

THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.]

No. 1862.—VOL. LXXII.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING JANUARY 7, 1899.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



HERO STAGGERED BACK, PURPLE WITH RAGE AND ASTONISHMENT.

A VAIN LOVE.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

LET no one call Hero Vyvash an unhappy woman, although all the hopes she nursed in her early girlhood have been unfulfilled, all her plans frustrated, all her dreams made foolish and void.

There are times when, thinking of the past, her heart grows sick and faint, her brain dizzy with the old, old pain that shall never cease this side of the grave.

But she is a wise and a brave woman, and rarely indulges in retrospection, holding it a sin to waste her life in vain regrets and vain desires. Her days are lightened by labours of love; and there is not a man, woman, or child in Anstey

that does not reverence her, and delight in her smile of approval.

For the rest my heroine is neither very beautiful nor very clever—just a brave, true English-woman, who bears her own cross patiently, uncomplainingly, whose feet tread her rough and lonely way steadily, and whose hands are ever ready to help the weak and the needy.

Let me tell you her strange, and story. She has learned the full significance of the words:—

"Sweet is true love, though given in vain, in vain,
And sweet is death, who puts an end to pain."

And she has learned to cry in her dark hours,—

"I fain would follow love, if that could be,
I needs must follow death, who calls for me.
Oath, and I follow, I follow let me die!"

Go back with me ten years. It is a bright June morning, and Hero sits with her lover in the sweet, old-fashioned garden, which is her pride and delight.

He has been reading to her, but now he closes

the book and looks half-wexedly up into her deep gray eyes.

"You were not listening, Hero!" he says. "How far away were your thoughts?"

"Not very far," faintly smiling. "I was wondering about Hetty, and what sort of life she led before she came to us! Do you think her so very handsome?"

There is a note of wistfulness in her voice, for Hero considers herself quite an ordinary little creature; and this girl, who came a week ago to change the current of her life, is handsome in face and physique.

"She is very beautiful!" Herbert says, "but I don't admire her. In some of her moods she is simply terrible. There is far too much diablerie in her composition to please me."

The girl looks satisfied, as she says,—

"Mr. Collinson was a great friend of papa's, and when he was dying he wrote, praying him to give Hetty a home. It seems her father was a poor, shiftless creature, and she confessed last night she did not grieve much when he

died. "I shall get on better without him," she said.

"That is a nice sentiment for a newly-orphaned girl to air! It is to be hoped she is not quite in earnest."

Suddenly the still sweet air is cleft by a gay voice singing clearly and jubilantly,—

"Pretty Dolly goes to keep a trysting
That she would not keep in sultry noon;
For 'tis beauty has an added sweetness
Nestled a golden harvest moon!"

The lovers start apart as Hetty crosses the lawn swiftly and lightly. She is wearing a loose blouse, which does duty for mourning, and she has fastened some scarlet and yellow exotics at her throat. Her hands are filled with roses, and the breeze playing about her, comes to Hero laden with their scent.

She sits down beside Hero, but addresses herself to Herbert Norman.

"This place is simply delightful!" she says, "so thoroughly conducive to romance. It has actually made me feel sentimental, and Hero's name is so deliciously suggestive of poetry and love."

"Tragic love," answers Miss Vyvash, with an attempt at playfulness. "The old Hero lost her Leander, you remember."

"Yes; but why on earth did she not console herself with another lover, instead of weeping, wailing, and gnashing her teeth?"

"That is what you would have done, Miss Collison!"

"Most decidedly, Mr. Norman. I should not have been so mad as to emulate my lover by drowning myself! Whilst my youth and beauty lasted I should have held my life dear. I always envy Helen of Troy, Ninon d'Enclos, and Cleopatra; they governed men so regally, and so long!"

"And they were all such good and worthy women," Herbert remarks, drily, "the sort of women who make excellent and chaste wives."

Hetty laughs.

"Oh! I am shocking your pastoral innocence, and, really, I am so wicked as to delight in it. But," with a sudden pathetic lowering of eyes and voice, which Hero distrusts, "don't think I am quite so black as I paint myself. I have contracted a bad habit of magnifying my faults, until they appear crimes. You see I have such a wholesome hatred of sham goodness that I fly to the opposite extreme!"

"A woman cannot be too careful of her words and actions!" Herbert says tersely; then adds, "your roses are dying; would it not be best to place them in water?"

"Thanks for the reminder," as she rises—there is an audacious mischievousness in her great black eyes—"I guess I am an intruder, after all. Oh! what devoted lovers you are! You will persuade me against my will that the race of Darby and Joan is not yet extinct."

"Why should it be?" Hero questions, her sweet voice grown sharp.

"Oh! the nineteenth century isn't favourable to their preservation!"

Hero and Herbert have risen too, and now walk with her towards the house; suddenly she asks—

"Hero, why is Mr. Vyvash a recluse? Why does he persistently avoid his neighbours?"

"How do you know that he avoids them?"

"He told me so, and of course I at once concluded he has a history! Some day, my dear, you shall tell it me!"

"I have nothing to tell," coldly. "Why should not my father prefer solitude for its own sake?"

"Because no man does. Modern hermits may be divided into two classes, the disappointed and the disgraced. And as Mr. Vyvash is an honourable man, he must belong to the first class!" and she shoots a disagreeably searching glance at Hero.

But the girl is unconscious of it, as she answers, quietly—

"His past is a sealed book to me, but I believe my mother's death made him a recluse. He loved her so dearly!"

For a moment they stand together in the

verandah; then Hetty enters the breakfast-room by the French window, and the lovers turn once more to the garden.

"I hate her!" Hero says, with all the vehemence of nineteen; "she is false and cruel!"

"Aren't you judging her a little too hastily and harshly? I grant she is not a model woman, but I think her diffidence is her greatest fault!"

Hurt and angry, that her lover should defend Hetty, Hero allows the subject to drop. But as the days lengthen into weeks, an unspoken antagonism grows up between the two girls, which on Hero's part is not lessened by her father's and Herbert's increasing partiality for Hetty.

The latter is one of those women who seem to drive all men mad with their beauty and their wiles. In an incredibly short time she has won Mr. Vyvash's confidence, invades his study at any hour of the day—a thing his own child has never dared to do—has begged Herbert's advice as to the course of study she should pursue; has won his pity by pathetic looks and speeches.

The gardener and page come under her sway; the one cuts his choicest blooms unobtrusively for her, and the other fetches and carries for her, like an intelligent animal; and all are agreed that Hero's dislike and distrust of her are the outcome of jealousy. Her father has said gravely—

"I am disappointed in you; I little thought you would grudge the poor girl a share of your home and your comforts."

Even Herbert remonstrates with her, and at times she wonders if she is wholly to blame.

One day, when Miss Collison has been at Anstey a month, a letter comes to Hero from the mother of an old friend, who writes praying her to go down to Walbourne without delay. The letter is short and pitiful, for the girl, who is dying of rapid decline, is her only child, and she is a widow.

Hero loses no time in putting some things together, and is feverishly anxious to start, although she dislikes the idea of leaving Hetty behind for an indefinite time. She telegraphs to Mrs. Ashwell to meet her at Walbourne Station the following morning, and that evening takes her last walk with Herbert through the dear familiar lanes, made sacred to her by his love.

Oh, never again will she walk there with him, secure and glad in his devotion; never any more will she see quite the same look in his eyes, hear quite the same note of tenderness in his voice. Why cannot she lie down this summer night and fall into that dreamless sleep from which there is no awakening? Why should she ever learn that her idol has feet of clay? Henceforth she will know no moonlit hour which does not recall all the quivering past, with its passion and pain (for it is pain to part from him even for awhile) which does not call into quicker, crueler life the old love, and old longing which she knows are each so vain.

They lean upon a gate, and Herbert has an arm about her waist.

"I shall miss you awfully, you little winsome thing!" he says, tenderly. "What magic have you used so to bewitch me—to make my days empty and incomplete without you? I think, Hero, no woman was ever loved so well as you."

She smiles up into his eyes.

"I sometimes wonder what you see in me to love. I am so awfully ordinary."

He laughs and removes her hat, passing his hand lightly and lovingly over her hair.

"What pretty hair it is!" he says. "I never saw any quite like it—all little waves and curls. I hate sleek-haired women. There is something so feline about them."

Her heart gives an exultant throb, for Hetty is decidedly sleek-haired, her hair absolutely refuses to curl, despite her utmost efforts with tongs and paper.

"I am glad my hair is pretty," she says. "I have nothing else to redeem me from utter plainness."

"Have you not?" with a little glad laugh.

"Are you fishing for compliments? No! Well, shall I tell you how you look to me?"

"Yes; that will be delightful; but don't

draw too largely on your fancy; the truth will not offend me."

"Well, I shall start with your eyes: just now they are grey as a November dawn, but they have a trick of changing colour. I have seen them blue as violets, and I have seen them black (but that was when you were in a rage. You're an awful spitfire, I'm afraid). Well, your face is a trifle too pale to please most folks, and a trifle too long to be oval. I don't believe there is a single perfect feature in it, but it makes a bewitching whole; your mouth is tantalising in the extreme, resolute, but most kissable. Perhaps your chin is a trifle too square, but I don't cavil at that; and the masses of hair about brow and cheeks are golden in the sunshine, brown in the shade. There, I have given you a judicious mixture of praise and disparagement. Are you content?"

"More than content! I believe you have called my latent vanity into life. Oh, Herbert! if you grow tired of me now my heart would break."

He catches her close to him—raises kisses on her.

"Sweet hands, sweet hair, sweet cheeks, sweet eyes, sweet mouth,
Each snugly wooed and won."

"I think," he says, whisperingly, "I love you the better that you were so hard to win; once I was half mad with my passion and fear. Oh, my darling! oh, my little darling! do you know what you are to me? I think if you were false I should go to the dogs utterly. When you come back to me, (and how can I let you go, even for a day, an hour,) we will coerce Mr. Vyvash into fixing an earlier date for our marriage. Ah, sweet! what a happy life yours shall be!"

Ah! what dreams they dreamed under that July moon; and now, were one curious to know the ending of their love, and with that purpose wandered in the old ways, one might well ask with the poet, "Where is she?" and one answering, would reply, "She has joined the great army of betrayed and broken-hearted women, for he who swore so deeply to cherish her through all time has fallen her."

Overhead the stars are shining, and the air is laden with delicate odours; close by a nightingale is singing, and the grasshoppers chirp at their feet. Hero was glad in the beauty of amber sky and grey-green meadows, and with the confident, pathetic trust of youth, believed her whole life would be one long sweet idyll. Poor child! poor child!

It is very late when they returned to the house. It is so hard to say good-bye! Herbert has a thousand and one tender things to say—is as loth to free her from his embrace as she is to leave it.

The parting is for so short a time, but her heart is heavy with it, and the hot tears sting her eyelids, stain the pallor of her sweet, pure face. What prompts her to say, with his arms still about her, his kisses still warm upon her mouth—

"You will not let Hetty's beauty make you forget me. When I am away, will you question your heart why you should love so poor a creature as I?"

"Am I likely to change?" Herbert asks, in a quick, pained way. "Isn't it rather late in the day to begin doubting me?"

In a sudden access of remorse she bows her face upon his breast.

"I love you so, I love you so!" she whispers; "let that be my excuse."

A little later a voice calls "Hero! Hero! are you never coming in?" and with a last farewell kiss, one last tender look into his deep brown eyes, she tears herself from him, and hurriedly enters the room where her father and Hetty are sitting.

Hero had hoped to spend these last few hours alone with her father, but Hetty keeps her seat at the piano, and sings the songs she knows Mr. Vyvash loves best—songs wholly unsuitable to Hero's voice, which is a soprano, and a not very strong one. Hetty has a divine contralto.

Disappointed, uneasy, Miss Vyvash goes to her room, but does not fall asleep until early dawn,

and then she is disturbed by unpleasant dreams, so that she is not sorry when Hetty wakes her with the words—

"Hurry up, Hero! You have only an hour in which to dress, breakfast, and get to the station. Of course, Mr. Norman goes with you!"

"Yes," Hero answers, tumbling out of bed and proceeding to dress hurriedly. "I wish you had called me before—I hate to be worried in this fashion."

But, after all, she is ready at the appointed time. Herbert drives up to the door in a dog-cart, and Hero turns to kiss her father good-bye. She is painfully aware that he will miss her less than before, thanks to Hetty; even his parting words carry a sting with them—

"Stay as long as you are useful to Mrs. Ashwell, my child; Hetty will take care of me."

Miss Collison is at this moment pinning a rose in Herbert's coat, and Hero asks, coldly, "Will she undertake to watch over Mr. Norman too?"

"Oh, dear, yes!" cries Hetty, unabashed. "I shall be happy to do so," flashing an arch glance at him. "You need have no anxiety about either."

Then Hero is assisted into her seat, the last good-byes have been spoken, and she is driven towards the minute station, which is the pride and boast of every native of Anstey.

The drive is not a cheerful one; Herbert is depressed, and Hero is disinclined to speech. But when they are on the platform he says eagerly—

"You will write me ever other day!"

"Of course; I will keep a sort of journal for your benefit."

"And I hope you will find your friend as far recovered that your stay need be only a short one. The days will be horrible without you."

He selects a carriage for her in which is seated a pleasant-looking old lady; then the signal is given to start. Hero leans down to him—

"My dear! my dear! good-bye—don't quite forget me."

A strong, close clasp of the hand, a flash of mutual passion in two pairs of eyes, and then she is carried away from him, and he stands lonely on the deserted platform, wondering what a whole life would be like without her, when one hour is so cruel.

And when they meet again she will know that in some subtle way he has changed—that nothing will ever be the same to her any more. The long, long days of her living martyrdom will have cast their shadow all athwart her way.

CHAPTER II.

HERO has been absent from home three weeks, and in that time Hetty Collison has greatly improved her acquaintance with Herbert.

To-night they stand together by the gate, where he and Hero had so often loitered, and they speak in hushed tones, although their words are common-places.

"To-morrow," says Hetty, pathetically, "Hero will share your walk, be your chosen companion," and then her voice dies out tremulously.

The young man flashes a quick glance at her; he looks pale and haggard, and his eyes are miserable. "We shall not leave you out in the cold, Hetty," he says, putting a strong constraint upon himself; but she shrugs her shoulders.

"Hero hates me! I wonder why! I thought she would be sorry for me, because I am penniless and an orphan. I don't wish to blame her. I owe the Vyvashes too much for that, but my life would be better and happier if she would regard me more kindly!"

"She is a girl of few loves," Herbert answers, deprecatingly, "but you must try to believe that you are not unpleasant to her. I am quite sure she means no unkindness!"

"Perhaps not," mournfully, "but I know this, that I cannot remain in this house after her return. I shall look about for something to do. I cannot eat the bread of dependence!"

Herbert Norman stretches out his hand and lays it upon her clasped fingers.

"Hetty," he says, hurriedly, "what do you purpose doing? What can you do?"

"I don't know," wearily, "but I am not altogether stupid. I suppose, if need were, I could learn some trade. I am not clever enough to teach, but I think I should do for the post of companion!"

"But have you thought of the drudgery, you poor child?" and his voice is a "thought too tender," his eyes a shade too passionate.

"Yes," she answers, lowly, "I have thought it all out, and I see no other course open to me. I am all alone in the world. Oh!" bending her face upon her hands, "if my dear father had lived, I had never fallen into such straits!"

He remembers the words Hero had repeated to him, and scarcely knows whether to believe them or not. Why should Hero lie about this beautiful girl, unless, indeed, she was jealous of her!

"I thought," he says, gently, "that Mr. Collison was a shiftless creature, rather a burden to you than otherwise!"

"Who dares say so!" she asks, lifting her head, passionately. "He was the kindest, best, most ill-used of all men," and suddenly hiding her face in her handkerchief she sobs aloud.

It is a fine piece of acting, and perfectly succeeds in blinding him.

"For Heaven's sake, forget my words," he says, earnestly; "I cannot bear your tears!"

She allows him to retain possession of her slender fingers, and for a moment lets her eyes rest upon his face with something in their dark depths that sets his heart throbbing tumultuously only to sink faint and cold within him, as the thought comes to him, "What would Hero say to these moonlight confidences!"

He drops Hetty's hands.

"Let us go home," he says, in a harsh, constrained voice; and without a word she turns her face in the direction of Anstey Cottage.

On the way they pass Herbert's home. It is a fine old building, and Hetty's eyes flash as mentally she registers a vow that one day she will reign there as mistress.

"I am more fit to wear his name than Hero," she thinks, with supreme contempt for her pale rival. "How could he believe himself in love with that little Quakeress!"

The following morning rises bright and clear, and, as Hero wakes, she whispers low down in her heart—

"I shall see him to-day. Oh! thank Heaven, I shall see him to-day!"

Yet she is not altogether glad to leave Wal-borne, for since Lucy's death Mrs. Ashwell has clung to her with pathetic affection. In a quiet way Hero has relieved her of all the sad business of the funeral arrangements, has comforted her in all her affliction, has stood in the place of a daughter to the poor desolate woman whose whole life lays wrecked, whose heart is broken.

They say good-bye in the little garden, where Lucy had so often lingered, but where she will never linger any more!

"You will forgive me that I don't volunteer to see you off," says Mrs. Ashwell, tearfully. "I am afraid I should break down on the platform. Oh, child! child! it is so hard to let you go!"

She takes the sweet, sympathetic face between her thin hands, and kisses it passionately, whilst the tears rain down her cheeks.

"You have been as an angel to me, and I shall miss you cruelly. May Heaven reward you for all your goodness, and make your life a happier one than mine!"

Alas! alas! how fruitless her blessing was to prove.

The journey to Anstey is long and tedious, but it comes to an end at last. The sun is fast setting when the train creeps along the little platform, and almost before it has come to a stand, Hero springs out, and lays her little fluttering hand in Herbert's.

What is it that chills her to the heart, and drives the faint bloom from her face? His manner is kind, but there is something of tenderness gone from it, and she who loves him so well readily detects this.

But no word of reproach or query passes her

lips; in silence she allows him to assist her into the dog-cart; in silence they perform the first part of their journey. Then he turns to her.

"You must come over early to-morrow. My mother is literally mad with delight at the prospect of seeing you."

"And are you glad to have me back again?" she questions, timidly.

"Of course I am. Why, Hero, what has come to you that you should need assurance of my love!" and, stooping, he kisses her once upon the mouth.

She shivers and grows sick with fear. Surely she misses some warmth in his kiss. And why will he so avoid her look? In a changed and cold voice she asks—

"And is my father well?"

"Remarkably! I have never seen him so cheerful as he has been lately."

A lump rises in her throat.

"Then he has not missed me?"

"Well, of course, it was not so lonely for him as it once would have been. Hetty is a very lively companion."

"You have made advance," Hero says, trying to speak lightly. "When I left home you spoke of her as Miss Collison."

"Oh! I look on her as a sort of relation, and I have seen her every day for the past three weeks."

"And did she console you in my absence?" with poor playfulness.

He glances coldly down at her.

"You are prettily jealous; pray believe neither Miss Collison nor I would wrong you."

"You are jumping at conclusions," the girl retorts swiftly. "Why should you misconstrue an innocent question?"

"It sounded strangely. There, don't look so grieved, Hero, I have no doubt you spoke thoughtlessly."

Thus he with manly magnanimity; and she answers pleadingly, her heart grown sick with dread—

"Herbert, tell me I am as much to you as when we said good-bye!"

"Why will you torment yourself and me with foolish doubts?" he answers. With the sound of her sweet young voice yet fresh in his ears—with her tender, pale face lifted to his, he cannot tell her the ghastly truth—he cannot say, "You have become wearisome to me. Your love is no longer a boon I crave; let me go free."

Alas! poor child, she is so confident in his honour; so easily satisfied. She lifts one little tremulous hand, and touches his face.

"You have been ill. Oh, my poor darling! you have been ill!" and she does not understand what has brought lines upon his brow, and about his mouth.

He laughs constrainedly.

"I was never better in my life, you anxious little soul. But the heat takes it out of one."

Now they bow along the broad drive, and Herbert brings the horse up smartly in front of the pretty verandah. Hero, disdainful assistance, springs to the ground, and flies to her father's side.

"Oh, my dear, my dear!" she cries, passionate love and entreaty in her voice. "Say you have missed me a little; say you wanted me back!"

"Of course I missed you, child; but, thanks to Hetty, my days have not been so dull as I anticipated," and, stooping, he kisses her brow.

She falls back from him, a trifle paler than before, and Hetty comes forward with a smile.

"Have you forgotten my existence, Hero? Why, how pale and wan you are! Your visit has certainly not been good for you."

"You forget I have witnessed much trouble since I left home."

"Oh, yes! of course. Poor Lucy Ashwell! Her death must be a dreadful blow to her mother. Don't you think Mr. Vyvash is looking exceptionally well? I can assure you I have taken the utmost care of him!"

"I hope you have extended your maternal care to Mr. Norman?" Hero remarks drily.

"He is certainly not looking very robust."

"We attribute that to grief for your absence," with a covert asser. "He should look quite a

Philistine, for I have prevailed upon him; to be my companion in all my long rambles. At harvest-time it is not quite a safe thing for girls to walk alone."

And with these words ringing in her ears Hero goes miserably up to her own room, feeling almost a stranger in her home. She has scarcely changed her dress when she hears the gong sound for dinner, and runs down hastily to take her old place at the head of the table. To her surprise she finds it already occupied by Hetty, who says, with a sweet smile—

"I thought I would spare you all fatigue, my dear; you have had such a terrifically long journey."

Her heart is bursting with anger, and her keen sense of injustice; but pride holds her silent. If father and lover elect she should hold a secondary place in the household, why should she complain?

Inch by inch Hetty gains upon her old ground, pushes her from the field; quietly contests her position in the house, until Hero gives up the unequal struggle, and sinks into a more cypher whilst yet she bears the name of mistress.

One morning the girls pay a visit to Mrs. Norman; the old lady is delighted to see Hero, but her face grows cold as she looks at Hetty, and her tone is icy. A man would wonder at the distinction she makes between her visitors; would ask himself how she can pass over Hetty's wondrous beauty for Hero's paler charms. But Mrs. Norman is a shrewd woman, and sees below the surface.

"What a horrid old woman she is!" Hetty says, as soon as they have left the house behind them. "I positively hate her."

"You had best not let Mr. Norman hear you say so, for he is old-fashioned enough to love and reverence his mother."

Before Hetty can reply a man appears through a gap in the hedge, disreputable in appearance, bold and swaggering, his face burnt brown by exposure to the sun and air, yet with something about him that speaks of better days.

"Can you tell me where Edwin Vyvash lives?" he asks, with a glance of insolent admiration at Hetty. "I've been told his diggings are somewhere in this lively hole."

"This is Miss Vyvash," Hetty says, quickly; "she will give you all necessary information," and she glances swiftly from one to the other. But Hero wears an unconscious expression, and she is disappointed.

"Are you his girl?" questions the man, turning to Hero.

Courage is not her cardinal virtue, and this fellow's appearance alarms her. Her voice is very faint, as she says—

"Yes; what is your business with my father?"

"He wouldn't thank me to tell you," with a brutal laugh. "I've heard he keeps no company, sees no strangers. Is that true?"

"Yes."

"I'll take care he sees me, though. Look here, you shall carry my message to him. Say Charles Ingram has found him out, and intends seeing him, whether he will or no."

Stung to anger by his insolence, Hero flashes upon him.

"I shall take no such message. If you come on a begging errand your impertinence is hardly likely to gain you assistance, and if you mean to extort money by threats you lay yourself open to the law."

"I've come on no begging errand," with an oath. "I only ask my due, and I don't mean to leave Anstey until I get it."

Hetty interposes again.

"My good fellow, you should know it is scarcely good form to swear before ladies. If Mr. Vyvash owes you anything, rest assured he will pay you in full."

"That's spoken fairly," with coarse familiarity. "Are you another daughter? I thought he had one only."

"I am merely a friend," she says, quietly; "but I will deliver your message."

"Thank you, miss; you know an educated man when you meet one," and he glances menacingly at Hero, who has walked to a

little distance; then he lifts his voice for her benefit.

"It would be wiser, Miss Vyvash, if you treated your father's friend with civility; you ought to know pride goes before a fall."

The girl forgets all her fear then, and looks into the furtive eyes with such quiet contempt that they quail before her.

"I don't care who or what you are," she says, in cold, clear tones, "but I am certain you were never my father's friend; he consorts only with gentlemen."

He bursts into a loud, coarse laugh.

"Things are changed. Ask him where he first met Charles Ingram, and who were his sole companions for five years!"

"Come away, Hetty; this man is beneath notice," and Hero walks slowly on, unconscious of the dark looks that follow her.

Hetty does not come up with her until she has reached the verandah; then she says—

"You must have been mad to defy that fellow as you did; for aught you know to the contrary he may be in possession of some unpleasant secret."

"There is nothing dark or secret in my father's life," coldly.

Hetty smiles disagreeably.

"Well, it will be wiser to carry Ingram's message to Mr. Vyvash, as he intends coming up here at eight this evening. I dare say I shall find him in the study."

"Thanks for the interest you take in this matter," sarcastically; "but I could not allow you to trouble yourself. I will perform this unpleasant duty," and she goes at once to the study.

As she enters, her father glances up.

"I thought it was Hetty," he says; "it is quite a new thing for you to board me in my den. What do you want, my dear?"

She sits beside him and tells him of her adventure, and gradually she sees his face grow livid and his eyes wild.

With a sudden passionate gesture he puts her from him, and bowing his head upon the table, groans bitterly.

"Father! father!" she entreats, kneeling beside him, "what power has this man over you! Why are you so terribly afraid! There is no reason why you should see him—"

"I must see him," he interrupts, wildly; "you don't know what his coming means for me!"

"Then tell me, dear. See, I am strong to bear anything for your sake," and her pale face is suddenly glorified by love and devotion.

But, weak and trembling as a little child, he still persists in thrusting her away.

"Leave me! leave me!" he cries, impatiently, "I am best alone."

"But surely I may share your trouble, dear!" she entreats; "try me, and see if I will fall you now. Whatever may come I will not flinch—I will prove myself worthy to be your child."

The door opens, and Hetty enters.

Hero springs to her feet.

"Are we not safe even here!" she questions, fiercely. "Am I never to spend a quiet hour with my father?"

"I beg your pardon," humbly. "I thought you were in your room."

Mr. Vyvash lifts his white and stricken face for a moment, and addresses Hetty,—

"I shall be glad to be alone," he says, plaintively. "The news Hero brought has upset me. Ingram is connected with a very troubled part of my life; he is quite cognizant of my distresses. I knew him about the time my wife died."

"You are more fortunate than some men, Mr. Vyvash," Hetty says, with her hand upon the door; "you have known only distress—some have been companions with disgrace."

Her voice is trembling, but in her eyes there is a look of malicious triumph as she turns away.

Hero goes wearily to her room, and shuts herself in.

"What is this mystery?" she questions, again and again, whilst her heart complains bitterly.

"He could offer her some explanation, but he did not think it necessary to enlighten my ignorance. Oh, my dear! my dear! is she to have all your love and trust!"

CHAPTER III.

THE clock in the hall has just struck eight when Charles Ingram makes his appearance. Mr. Vyvash has given orders for his admission, so that the servant who conducts him to the study can only show his disapproval by openly contemptuous glances at his attire and general air. Once inside the study, the swaggering manner he adopts with all who are too weak too defy him increases; he plants his back against the door and looks triumphantly down at his victim, who gasses appealingly up at him.

"So I've found you again, my boy, although you thought you'd given me the slip!" he says.

"By Jingo, you look sixty, and you can't be much over forty! A conscience is an uncomfortable thing."

"What do you want?" Mr. Vyvash asks feebly. "Why could you not write instead of coming here?"

"Because I didn't intend to lose sight of you again, my friend," in a bullying tone. "You would be cutting off to some other nice rural spot, and changing your name again."

"Hnah, don't speak so loudly; you will be heard."

"Well, if I am, what then? Have I anything to lose?"

"Perhaps not, but I have."

"Just so. I'm glad you take such a sensible view of the case. Of course you figure here as 'the gentle hermit,' the man whose life is so pure from reproach that you are held up as an example to your neighbours."

"No! no!" earnestly. "I have nothing to do with the outside world; I said good-bye to it years ago. Ingram, how much do you want to keep my secret?"

Ingram looked at him artfully, and instead of answering his question, says,—

"Is that pale-faced wench who was so fancy your child? The other one said she was, but women are such liars."

"Yes, what of that?"

"Does she know anything of your past life, my friend?"

"Heaven forbid!"

"Well, now the mere fact that she is ignorant of your little slip makes my knowledge all the more valuable. I did think of asking a nice sum down, but now I see my way to a snug annuity and a comfortable home. Your quarters aren't bad, but they are decidedly dull; still I'll soon alter that."

"What do you mean?" Mr. Vyvash asks tremulously.

"Why, nothing more or less than this," answers Ingram, bringing his hand heavily down upon the table. "You shall pay me a certain sum quarterly (we will decide on the amount presently), and I shall remain here as a permanent member of the family."

Mr. Vyvash starts to his feet, looking younger and nobler in his sudden wrath.

"You are mad!" he cries. "Do you suppose for an instant I would countenance your presence here—would allow you to sit down with my daughter?"

"I shouldn't harm her," the other retorts, coolly. "Is her name so stainless that she can afford to be proud with me? Look here, Vyvash—and I give you your new name out of sheer kindness—you had better be reasonable; unless you are, I'll make things uncomfortable for you, and this place too hot to hold you. I'll go to your girl and tell her all I know of you. Do you think she will be quite so fond and proud of you then?" and leaning forward he peers into the other man's face with his furtive, blood-shot eyes.

Mr. Vyvash sinks into his chair like one cowed, and Ingram goes on,—

"I don't want to drive you too hard; but I'm a man of my word, and I shan't go from my proposal."

"But for Hero to meet you daily!" in accents of horror.

"She might do worse."

"You forget what your crime was. Man-slaughter is an ugly word, and your victim was a helpless woman."

"Pooh!" says Ingram, "it was all an accident, and she was a provoking jade. The worst fault I ever committed was marrying her. But come to the point," with would-be personalness. "Do you agree to my proposal?"

"I suppose I must," in a low, stricken tone; "but have you no mercy! I will double the price of your silence if you will only go away from here."

"But I tell you I won't. I've made up my mind to reform. With your help I intend getting into society. Who knows but that I shall end by marrying a county belle. I might do worse than take your daughter."

"Silence!" thunders Mr. Vyvash; "this is more even than I can bear."

Outside a woman is stooping, her ear placed against the keyhole. What is this secret Ingram holds? she asks herself again and again. By fair or foul means she will be in possession of it, and then let Hero look to herself.

So absorbed is she in her occupation that she does not hear a light, swift step along the passage, and starts when a hand is laid upon her shoulder, and a voice says coldly,—

"What are you doing here?"

She lifts herself erect, and looks down at Hero with grave reproach in her eyes.

"You think I am listening out of sheer curiosity, but you are mistaken. I heard angry voices, and thought Mr. Vyvash called for help, so I ran here."

"And thought, if assistance were needed you could give it by remaining outside? Really, Miss Collison, you credit me with too large a belief in you."

"I know," says Hetty, still speaking in a whisper, "you misconstrue every word and deed of mine. One day you will regret your harshness."

"If that day ever comes," Hero answers, scornfully, "I will make you all the amendment in my power;" then, without knocking, she opens the door and enters. "Father, Hetty said you called. Did you want me?"

"No, no, my dear!" he says, hurriedly, not daring to look at her; "go away. Mr. Ingram and I have business matters to settle, and—and—he will remain here to-night."

Hero opens her eyes wide upon the stranger, takes in at a glance the shabby, frayed garments, the unwashed, unshaven bloated face, the general air of viciousness, and then says, quietly—

"The servants' rooms are full. Perhaps he can be accommodated at the 'Green Man.'"

"Mr. Ingram is my guest," answers the unhappy man, "and, as such, you will do your best to amuse him during his stay. He may find it convenient to remain here a few days."

The girl bows, and walks quietly away, offering no apology to Ingram for what her father terms her mistake. Her heart feels cold and dead within her. A terrible sense of fear has settled upon her, which, try as she will, she cannot shake off.

She goes back to the drawing-room, where Hetty is now entertaining Herbert. He lifts his eyes as his betrothed enters. She is looking very pale and worn, being one of those women who lose flesh and bloom by an hour's sickness or anxiety.

Mentally, he contrasts her with Miss Collison, who is unusually brilliant. There is an exquisite bloom on her dark cheek, a great light in her marvellous eyes.

What wonder if he is dissatisfied with his choice—this poor, pale little flower no other man has cared to gather for himself!

And to-night she so longs for a kindly word—a loving look; but Herbert is constrained, and she is too proud to beg favour or notice.

In the morning, when she goes down, she finds Charles Ingram already seated at table, and doing ample justice to the breakfast, Hetty

who sits opposite, is laughing and chatting with him gaily.

With a contemptuous glance round, Hero turns to leave the room, addressing the maid as she does so.

"Serve my breakfast in my own room; and so long as Mr. Ingram remains I shall not come down."

Ingram lifts his eyes to the pure, pale face, the proud little figure standing in the doorway. Then he brings his fist heavily down upon the table.

"I'll bring your pride down yet!" he says, with an oath. "I'll make matters the reverse of comfortable for old Vyvash. I'll—"

"Pray spare your threats; they do not alarm me," and so she leaves them.

Then Hetty dismisses the maid and crosses to Ingram. She lays her hand upon his shoulder with a familiarity that startles even him.

"You are going to tell me what hold you have upon Mr. Vyvash?" she says, inaudibly.

He laughs coarsely.

"Is it likely! What value will my secret be to me if I share it with others?"

"I will not make any market out of it; I am only curious."

"You've a motive for wishing to know," he answers, cunningly. "Look here, Miss Collison; you're a deuced handsome girl, and I'd like to oblige you if I could; but you're as poor as I am, and I can't have you peaching on my preserves."

She leans a little nearer.

"I will be frank with you," she says, with a bewildering smile. "I hate Hero Vyvash with all my heart. You see what she is; she treats me with the same contempt that she lavishes on you. I want to have such power over her as you have over that drivelling old doddard, her father. Come, why should you be selfish! Let me share your secret, and I swear I won't divulge it to any other."

She looks so beautiful, so enticing; she leans so near that he is sick with the scent of her robes—the roses at her breast.

"I guess you're a Delilah," he says, huckly, "but for the life of me I can't deny you anything. I'll make a clean breast of it to you, only I want a reward," and she almost shivers away from him—there is such sudden wild passion in his eyes.

"What is it? If it is in my power to give, believe me you have it already," she says, and hides her loathing of him well.

"One kiss!" he entreats, "only one, Hetty, I'm like water in your hands, and I've known you something else than a day."

A moment she stands irresolute, then she answers,—

"You shall have your wish, I promise. Now tell me all."

"Bend down; it's madness to talk too loudly about this matter."

Then he whispers a few words in the girl's ear. She starts, flushes hotly, whilst a look of malignant triumph makes her face demoniacal; then with a little low laugh she kisses him lightly upon the mouth, saying,—

"I am eternally grateful to you. See, each can help the other; let us clasp hands and swear comradeship."

He takes the slender fingers in his great red palm, and looks into her flashing eyes with passionate admiration.

"You're a woman after my own heart; and together we ought to feather our nests pretty well. And if you'll only give me a little help, I should be quite another sort of fellow."

"What do you mean by giving you help?" she questions, with difficulty keeping her anger and loathing under control.

"What does a man mean when he talks to a woman like that, Miss Collison? Hetty, you're the loveliest and most bewitching woman I have ever met, and upon my honour, I love you!"

"I am flattered!" she says, courtesying to him, "but, really, I don't see how you could maintain a wife. You are penniless, and, pardon me,

your character is not one that will bear inspection."

"But old Vyvash must allow me a good income, and no one need know anything of my past."

"I haven't much faith in such sudden attachments, and of course, you must understand that poor as I am, I am still a lady, whilst you originally were—"

"A merchant's clerk," sullenly.

"Just so; and you found a difficulty in distinguishing between your master's goods and your own. It isn't an uncommon falling by any means. Now, don't scowl so horribly, because I have only spoken the truth, and I am not a coward, like the girl upstairs."

She glances out of the window as she speaks, and seeing Herbert crossing the lawn, says,—

"I must leave you to your own devices for a short time; you will find the victim in the study."

So she steps out into the verandah, smiling pensively, and gives her hand to Mr. Norman, allows it to rest a thought too long in his, then says,—

"I am afraid you will have to be content with my society for a short time. Hero is with her father engaged in an earnest conversation (from which I am excluded). I am afraid—oh! I terribly afraid, some calamity has fallen upon Mr. Vyvash; that at some time in his life he put himself in the power of the man Ingram. Certain it is that the latter is levying blackmail."

Herbert's sallow face flushes; pride is his great failing, and Hetty knows this.

"I hope to Heaven he has done nothing disgraceful. Of course, if it were so, I should not think less of Hero, but I should certainly prefer my wife's name should be as stainless as my own."

"Yes; you are naturally proud of your race!" softly. "Poor Hero! she has such perfect faith in her father that to find any flaw in him would almost break her heart. I fear that she is not wholly ignorant of coming trouble, she looks so pale and wan this morning. Isn't it curious what an effect an hour's illness or worry has upon her?" and she lifts sympathetic lovely eyes to his.

"She is a girl who feels acutely," Herbert answers, constrainedly; then suddenly he catches Hetty's hands in his, and draws her quite close to him. "Hetty," he says, hoarsely, "Hetty, what shall we do with our lives?"

She will not look at him now; but the ice is broken, and he goes on passionately,—

"That I love you, you know; and I am tempted to believe you are not indifferent to me. Oh, if I had been less rash, if I had but waited until I was sure of my devotion to Hero! Hetty, my darling Hetty! I have forged such chains as cannot be broken! I have laid waste all my own life. Heaven grant I have not spoiled yours."

She throws herself on his breast, sobbing and clinging to him. It is an awful moment for the man; he loves her with such mad, blind passion, that the touch of her hands makes him sick and faint, and all his soul cries out for freedom to woo this most lovely and loving woman.

"Pity me, pity me!" she wails; "your compassion is all I dare ask—all I deserve, for I have given you my heart unsought; have allowed you to learn the secret which is also my shame."

Then again she is silent, whilst he madly kisses her, and calls her by sweet endearing names, that once were Hero's only.

The world grows brighter, the birds sing more loudly, the air farish with the odour of flowers. Surely, in such a paradise, with the woman he loves, he may snatch a brief hour of unalloyed happiness.

But suddenly a voice cries,—

"Herbert! Herbert!"

With a swift gesture he puts Hetty aside, and goes to meet Hero.

She is very pale and grave; there is no longer any loveliness in her eye or face, and her step is heavy.

Two months ago he would have been filled with passionate anxiety for her; but now he is only

conscious of distaste for her society, and annoyance at her faded appearance.

Hetty has contrived to disappear through the thick-growing bushes, and as Hero joins him Herbert places his arm lightly about her waist—an old habit—and asks, not without some sharpness,—

"How long is that cad to be your guest?"

"I cannot say," with an air of utter weariness, "but I have an idea that he has some claim upon my father's gratitude. If it were not so, he would most certainly have been ejected long ago."

"Well, he is a curious acquaintance for a gentleman; but I suppose, Mr. Vyvash understands his own affairs."

She glances swiftly into his face—the face so changed and cold now—then she looks down a little paler, a little wearier, with that awful dread tearing at her heart-strings.

She is not sorry when Herbert declares he must go; she rather seeks to hasten than retard his departure—the meeting has been so unsatisfactory, his manner so cold.

As he holds her hand lightly in his, she says, carelessly,—

"Had you been long here when I joined you?"

"Not very," with a sudden contraction of the brows; "why do you ask?"

"Because papa told me you were here, and I had missed Hetty from the house. Was she with you?"

He drops the little child hand.

"Yes. Am I to be treated to another ebullition of jealousy?"

"No," quietly and coldly, "I have no wish to offend you. Are you coming up to-night? You will find me with papa in the study."

So they part without a word of tenderness, without an embrace or caress. The man goes his way to dream of the beautiful girl who is making him traitor to his word, and Hero goes back to her room to spend the long hours in bitter anguish of soul.

CHAPTER IV.

HERO dines alone, and when she has finished her poor little meal, sits in her room listening for the first sound of Herbert's footsteps.

Suddenly the door opens, and Hetty enters without ceremony.

"What are you doing here, sitting like an owl in the twilight?" she questions, sharply, and there is an unpleasant note of command in her voice.

"I am not answerable to you for all my vagaries," coldly; "but I will not sit down with the creature who seems to find such favour in your eyes. Hetty, how can you so far forget what is due to yourself as to cry 'Hall, fellow!' to Charles Ingram?"

Hetty laughs shortly.

"It would be better for you if you showed him less animosity, seeing that he holds your happiness and honour alike in his hand."

"What do you mean?" and through her voice there runs a tremor as of fear.

"That if you love your father (as you profess to do) you will not make him more miserable than he is now. Ingram is not a merciful man, and for every insult he receives he will give double."

"But what has placed us in his power?"

"Your father's sin!" Hetty answers, with cruel distinctness.

Hero springs to her feet.

"You don't know what you are saying," she cries, hoarsely. "How dare you bring my accusation against him! Do you forget all you owe him?"

Hetty's lip curls scornfully.

"Am I likely to forget my debts? Do you expect me to be grateful for grudging charity? Hero Vyvash, many and many a time I have winced under your words; you have deceived me, hated me, distrusted me; but it is my day now. I, at least, am the child of an honourable man. You are a felon's daughter."

The girl falls against the wall, her hands

pressed hard upon her breast; in the dim light her face gleams forth grey and rigid; her eyes are dark with unutterable woe. Once, twice, she essays to speak, but her tongue refuses to obey her will, and Hetty's triumph momentarily increases.

"At present your father's past is known only to Ingram and myself; but of course Herbert must be told, and then do you suppose he or his haughty mother will seek an alliance with you? Why, even the name you wear is not your own—you are Hero Wentworth, and your father is a forger."

"Oh, you lie to me! You lie to me!" wails the other. "What have I ever done to you that my calamity should be your joy? Let me pass. I am going to my father!"

Hetty stands aside holding her skirts close lest Hero's dress should brush against them. With swift uncertain steps the unhappy girl flies downstairs and towards the library.

Her father is alone, and looks up with a wan smile as she enters; then, seeing her face, covers his own and groans aloud. He had hoped and prayed she should never learn his crime, and now all his prayers are made void, all his schemes frustrated—

Hero flings herself down at his feet, and hiding her face upon his knees, sobs out—

"Oh, my dear! Oh, my dear! say it is not true. Do not break my heart. Tell me she lied."

"My child!" (how broken and feeble his voice is!) "My child, I cannot tell you this. Oh! look up, look up! Say that your unhappy father has not lost your love with your belief."

He is sobbing like a child, and her tender heart is touched with passionate pity for him. She lifts herself, and draws down his head to her level; as yet she has no words with which to comfort him; her heart is beating heavily, her brain is in a whirl.

Who is she that she dare lift her eyes to Herbert—dare aspire to being his wife! Will he look on her with changed eyes when he knows (as of course he must) the sad, sad story of her father's crime! Will not Madame Norman, as the villagers call the stately old lady, thrust her away in angry scorn!

"Child! child! Why are you so silent?" pleads the broken voice. "Heaven knows I have tried to make your life happy; to keep all shadows from your path."

"Yes, yes!" she interrupts, wildly. "You have always been generous, always good—always my dear father. Oh, come close! Clasp my hands in yours whilst I tell you all you are to me; whilst I swear to love you more, not less, to do my poor best to help you in your affliction."

Like one gone mad with joy to find her unchanged he kisses her wan-white face and pale lips; clasps her closer to his breast, and so holds her whilst she fights fiercely for composure.

"Who told you the dreadful truth?" he asks at length; "but, of course, it was Ingram!"

"No; Hetty is in his confidence. She told me. Oh, father! how many times have I implored you to trust her less! I don't mean to reproach you, but if she had never come here we should have been happier!"

"What else could I do? She is an orphan and so beautiful that it would have been unwise to place her with unknown people. Hero, are you fretting about Herbert? You poor child, you need have small fear concerning him; he shall never learn my secret. I can square matters with Ingram, and, for gratitude's sake, Hetty will be silent."

"Oh!" bitterly. "You do not read her character aright. She hates us both. You, because she owes you so much; me, because I distrust her! And, my dear, do you believe I can deceive Herbert! Whatever follows he must be told. I will not go to him with a load upon my conscience!"

"It must be as you will," wearily. "Loving you he will be merciful to me. The young are more generous than the old. Hero," and his voice sinks lower yet, "you have asked me nothing yet."

"I am content to wait, my dear, until you choose to speak."

Perhaps he longs for sympathy, perhaps the years of alliance have been so irksome that he is glad to unbosom to her; or it may be he hopes in some measure to excuse his crime to this one creature, who will love him but the more for his sin and suffering.

Hero sits at his feet; his hands are laid carelessly upon the bowed brown head.

"You don't remember your mother, child; how should you! You were scarcely two months old when she died. Her malady was 'a broken heart.'"

He pauses, and his eyes grow dim as he remembers the tender, loving young wife, who had drooped and died alone and in poverty.

"My name is Wentworth. I was the only son of an eccentric and autocratic gentleman, and he mapped out a great career for me. As I grew up he showed great pride in, but never love for me; and, consequently, I regarded him with a feeling of awe."

"I was sent to Eton, and from thence to Oxford; and at the latter place I met your mother. She was the daughter of a small tradesman, but by education and feeling a lady. We became acquainted through an accident, and afterwards I used to waylay her. Finally, I went to her father and asked permission to address her. This he refused unless my friends would sanction our engagement, and he wrote to my father, laying the whole matter before him."

"The result was that I was at once removed from Oxford, and given to understand that if I persisted in my folly my father would disown me. I laughed at the threat, because, although he was not compelled to make me any allowance, I knew at his death the whole property must revert to me; and surely, in the meanwhile, I could gain a decent livelihood for Edith and myself."

"I waited in apparent submission until quarter-day, when I drew my last allowance; then I went down to Oxford, and by dint of persuasions induced Edith to marry me secretly."

"After the ceremony we went to her home, and I never saw anything so awful as her father's rage, her mother's cold contempt. I swore she should never see either again, and carried her off to London."

"Then I set myself to find work; but week after week passed by, and I had not obtained so much as a day's employment. It seemed that my education (complete as I believed it) was totally unsuited to help me. I knew nothing of book-keeping, consequently could not take a clerkship; and when I applied for the post of usher, I was met by the question—Why had I not taken my degree! No one who was not a B.A. need aspire to the dignity of under-master."

"I began to despair; my little stock of money was dwindling rapidly. I had no means of obtaining more, and Edith was in a delicate condition."

"I humbled my pride and wrote to my father praying his assistance. My letter was returned to me torn in halves. Then Edith applied to her friends, but received no response, and things grew desperate."

"We had been married eleven months when you were born, and it drove me well-nigh mad to know my wife wanted the commonest necessities; and in my madness I committed my crime."

"I forged the name of an old college friend. The forgery was so clumsily executed that it was immediately discovered, and I was arrested. In the days of my Oxford life I had often assisted this man peculiarly—he had since come into a fortune—but he forgot past benefits, and hounded me down."

Mr. Vyvash pauses, and his daughter's arms steal about his neck, her tender lips are laid on his.

A sob breaks from his tortured heart.

"You do not hate me, Hero!"

"No, no! I love you the more for your suffering," she answers, softly; and then he takes up the thread of his story once more.

"My crime killed your mother. She did not live to hear my sentence; and as she lay dying,

our landlady—a good woman and motherly—offered to take you and treat you as her own until I was released. Well, I went to Dartmoor for five years, and in the meantime Edith died, and was buried by the parish, and you were growing up a little toddling child, acquainted already with poverty and grief. At Dartmoor I first met Ingram, and, in a moment of dreadful desolation, confided my whole story to him.

"I will not dwell upon that part of my life; I have hurt you too much already. The day came when I was once more free, and I travelled down to my own home, full of hatred towards my father, vowing to revenge my sufferings upon him. I found the house closed and empty—he was dead, and I, the felon—the outcast—was heir to his wealth. I sold the property at the earliest possible date, and returned to town to take possession of you.

"I placed you at school, and, as my old friend (the landlady) was anxious to join her relatives in Australia, I paid her passage out, and then started for America, where I remained three years. When I returned, I was so changed that even you did not recognise me—*tomorrow* had done its work well; I was broken down and old before I was thirty.

"From the date of my return you know all there is to know—my lonely life, my dread of society. Oh, child! oh, child! thank Heaven you can never know my sufferings; the burden of my sin will never rest on you. Edwin Wentworth is dead, and Edwin Vyvash fills his place. Never fear, Hero, we will weather the storm; even at the cost of half my fortune Ingram shall be silenced, and, for her own sake, Hetty will be secret. It rests with yourself whether or no Herbert shall be told this thing; but, my dear, be advised by me."

"No, no; I must tell him all, and throw myself on his mercy," she answers, wearily, and as one spent with long toil. "If his heart fails him, if his love is weaker than his pride, if I am less to him than his honourable name, why then he shall be free. Oh! at whatever cost to me, he must be made glad."

"Think again, Hero. Remember that men are selfish—that to lose him would be to lose all the happiness from your life, and that—

"Where ignorance is bliss—
'Tis folly to be wise."

She shakes her head mournfully.

"I will not deceive him," she says, gently; "and, dear, if he loves me half so well as I do him, he will not let this come between us. He will rather pity you. See where you fell; he, too, might fall under like temptation. When he thinks of those five long years of pain and shame his heart will bleed for you."

Mr. Vyvash is doubtful of the effect Hero's disclosure will have upon her lover, but he cannot dash her hope to the ground, or bring deeper shadows into those dark grey eyes.

How pale and wan she is! He remembers that his wife looked thus when she was torn away from him; and, with a groan, he prays "Heaven grant my child's life may be happier than hers!"

Oh! well for him, and for the silent girl, the future is a sealed book to them!—that they cannot see the long and lonely way which stretches out through the slow, dark years to come.

Suddenly Hero starts up. She has heard Ingram's unsteady step along the passages; and now she stands (her hands laid lovingly upon her father's shoulders) waiting the coming of her *little noir*.

He enters noisily, and one glance at his flushed face is sufficient to show he has been drinking freely. With a lurch he comes close to the girl, and looks into her eyes with tipsy solemnity.

"So you won't break bread with me, you pale-faced jade!" he says; and she, not flinching, answers—

"I am averse to the society of rogues!"

"What!" yells Ingram; "say it again!"

Quietly she repeats her words, and he lifts his hand threateningly. Mr. Vyvash hastily interposes.

"Touch her if you dare!" he cries, his voice trembling with rage. "I am the alder, but I will give you such a sound thrashing as shall prostrate you for weeks!"

"Tell her not to aggravate me," the other answers, suddenly. "What fellow could stand her gibes and sneers? I'm willing enough to be friends. Shake hands, Miss Wentworth," and he put out a dirty hand, which she regards with insatiable contempt."

"I am not a hypocrite," she answers, shortly, and turns away.

He looks knowingly at her, then says—

"I've business to discuss with your father that is unfit for a lady's ears; perhaps you will leave us!"

"Not until Mr. Vyvash requests me to do so!"

"Go, dear!" her father whispers; "your staying will not improve matters," and she moves towards the door in obedience to his wish.

Ingram opens it, and as she is passing out leans near—

"Think over what I said. I won't be hard on you if you'll treat me as you should. Come, kiss and be friends."

His hated face is close to hers; his hot, foul breath makes her sick and faint. With a sudden accession of passion she lifts her hand, and strikes him smartly across the mouth. He staggers back, purple with rage and surprise, but he does not venture to touch her.

"You saw that, Wentworth!" he says, with an oath. "Perhaps you will put a stop to it, for I'm hanged if I stand her nonsense any longer!"

With a glance of contempt Hero disappears and hurries away to her own room, to brood over her troubles, to strive madly for the courage to endure any and every evil yet to come.

She is almost glad that Herbert absents himself from the Cottage; she is scarcely in the mood to meet any creature to-night; heart and head alike are aching, and a dreadful fear is on her that the idol she has so long worshipped, that she will love until she dies, will fall as others have done—will prove, after all, to have feet of clay.

She tries to think what life would be to her without his love, and cries aloud—

"Oh, better death than loss of him! Oh, Heaven! spare me that calamity!" and falls to weeping bitterly.

The night wears by; the long, slow night fraught with tears and agonising thought. The chill, grey dawn comes at last, and with it new courage, new hope, new powers of endurance.

Hero flings open her window and leans out. She is worn with conflict; her eyes are heavy and sunken, and little lines of pain show upon the broad, white brow, about the tender, resolute mouth.

She seems to have lost all her little claim to prettiness; her youth is suddenly changed to age. Will she be less fair to Herbert now? Oh, Heaven! help the poor child if she finds no favour in his eyes—if contrasting her with her rival he shall hold the latter dearest and best!

She goes down to breakfast, and with a sad, new dignity takes her seat once more at the head of the table, much to Hetty's disgust.

CHAPTER V.

EVENING comes again, but Herbert has not yet appeared; all day Hero has waited for him, and her heart has grown sick with hope deferred.

Can it be that he has already heard the story she has to tell, and means by silence to show her his resolve? Will he put her away without any word of explanation or farewell?

White and silent she goes about the house, resuming her old place, performing her old duties with such firmness that Hetty for once is subdued, and even Ingram is quieter—more choice in words and ways.

It is a dreadfully wet and heavy day; the ground is sodden, the changing foliage of tree and shrub

hangs limp upon the boughs, and the sky is one uniform drab hue.

"What a dreary outlook!" says Hetty, yawning extensively. "It is enough to drive one melancholy mad. I think I shall get my cloak and take a run through the grounds."

"It is raining fast!" Hero remarks, coldly. "It would be wiser to stay indoors," and she pretends to be engrossed with some work.

It is growing quite dusk, when Hetty, whose restlessness momentarily increases, rises and goes out. A little later Hero hears the hall-door open and shut, and, glancing up, sees the tall, dark figure of her late companion crossing the lawn.

She is not suspicious, but she cannot help thinking Hetty has some ulterior motive for her wet and dreary walk. She sits with idly-folded hands trying to guess what that motive may be, and the room grows darker still. Outside the night is fast closing in, the rain beats pitilessly upon the windows, falls with steady drip, drip, upon the paths, and still Hetty does not return.

Suddenly a thought comes to Hero which drives the little remaining colour from lip and cheek; it seems that a voice whispers to her heart—

"She has gone to meet your lover!"

Swift as lightning she rises, and hurrying into the hall, secures a waterproof, in which she envelops her whole figure, and then she, too, passes out, peering through the darkness and rain in search of Hetty and Herbert. Each moment the conviction that they are together becomes stronger and stronger; but they are not on the lawn; the arbours are deserted, the rosy silent and dim.

She passes on to the shrubbery, and then she catches the glimmer of Hetty's grey cloak, hears the low murmur of her voice, through the gloom can just discern a man's figure, and her heart tells her who that man is. For a moment she stands like one stricken with death; her eyes are wide with anguish, her poor wan face ghastly and distorted, her limbs rigid.

But presently she stirs, and a little low moan, like the wail of a child in pain, breaks from her; then almost unconsciously of what she does she goes forward, screening herself behind shrubs and trees, until she is quite close to them.

Herbert is looking moodily down; Hetty is talking eagerly, her handsome face very bright and earnest.

"Surely you do not hold yourself bound to Hero Vyvash or Wentworth?" (I hardly know to which name she is entitled), "now that you have learned all? I have often heard you say you would not marry a woman of doubtful antecedents, and here are more than doubtful."

Silence a time, save for the drip, drip, of the rain upon the trees and grass. Then the man speaks, and how eagerly the unhappy listener has waited his reply.

"I am more annoyed by this catastrophe than you can tell. My boast has always been that no Norman has ever allied himself to a woman whose relatives are unrepresentable. But, Hetty, I can hardly break my engagement on this pretext. The fault is not Hero's, poor child, and she must not be made to suffer for it."

"Oh, he loves me still! he loves me still!" the "poor child" cries in her heart, then strives for calmness that she may hear Hetty's words. They are very distinct and very cruel.

"But you have sworn that you love me—that I am more to you than ever Hero Vyvash was."

"And so you are," passionately. "You should need no further assurance."

The listener flings her hands high above her head.

"Heaven save me from madness! Herbert! oh, Herbert! strike me dead here, and now! How can I live if you are false!"

No one hears the low wail; there is no one to heed her, or grieve with her. She sinks on her knees on the long wet grass, and hides her piteous white face in her cold, trembling hands.

"Love, love!" and the voice is Herbert's. "I wish to Heaven we had never met, or that I had not madly dreamed my happiness was bound up in Hero. Ah! my darling, let us part

now, whilst I have some remnant of honour. There is nothing else left us to do."

"I will not let you go," cries Hetty. "You shall not spoil our two lives. Can she love you as I do? Will she grieve if you break your promise? I tell you no."

"Oh, you lie, you lie!" breathes the kneeling girl; "he is all the world to me—my love, my life; but you have stolen him away. Oh! what shall I do! What shall I do!"

She lifts her weary head, and parting the thick growth of leaves looks out upon her lover—hers no more. He has drawn Hetty into his embrace, her arms are about his neck, her lips laid upon his.

"I cannot bear it, I cannot bear it," she says wildly, and cowers down again.

"Take me back, Herbert. Hero will send someone in search of me soon. Kiss me again. Oh! How can you have the harsh strength necessary to send me away?"

"If you love me you will not tempt me, Hetty."

"It is because I love you that I tempt you to your happiness."

"Sweetheart, be brave, be true to yourself. Oh, love! love!"

"Those names were Hero's once," murmurs the wretched girl, and she speaks of herself as of one who is dead; "you have forgotten her—oh! so long ago, so long ago, it seems."

Then she hears their steps drawing near, and shrinks further into the dense shadows of the wet foliage. If she stretches out her hand she can touch Hetty's cloak; if she speaks but in a whisper Herbert will hear. But she is silent, motionless, until they have passed her by, and Herbert's last words have reached her.

"If it is any consolation to you, Hetty, remember, if you are miserable, so am I. There is no more miserable man on earth."

Then she flings herself face downwards, writhing and moaning in her agony. How long she lies there she cannot tell; but at last she rises stiff and numb, and, in some way that she herself does not understand, reaches the house, and enters by one of the windows.

Some instinct urges her to go to her room—it is the instinct of the wounded deer—and then she begins hurriedly to change her dress, to do away with all tears of the recent conflict. She must see Herbert to-night—at once.

She will give him his freedom, and he shall not know what pain it costs her to be so generous. As she passes a mirror she catches the reflection of her face—it is drawn and ghastly.

"He must not see me thus," she thinks, with a shrob of pride, and as she pauses on the threshold she remembers having seen some rouge on Hetty's toilet-table.

She enters the girl's room, and proceeds at once to impart some colour to her white and wasted cheeks; the application is not very skilful, but it will deceive Herbert, or she hopes it will.

Slowly and heavily she goes downstairs, and as she enters the drawing-room Herbert glances towards her with an expression of surprise. She looks almost pretty with the carmine tint upon her face, and her eyes are bright with anguish which he is too blind to see.

"Where have you been?" he questions. "I arrived nearly an hour ago."

She brushes through her rouge, but meets his eyes bravely.

"I did not hear you come," she says, and her low, sweet voice is very cold and proud. "I am sorry to have kept you waiting."

"How brilliant you are!" Hetty breaks in, maliciously. "A stranger would think you were painted—your colour is so deliciously delicate!"

Hero looks at her with calmest scorn, but makes no reply. She lays her hand lightly on Herbert's arm—such a little, cold hand it is,—

"I wish to see you alone for ten minutes. Will you come into the next room?"

"Oh, I will go!" cries Hetty, springing up. "I feel myself quite de trop."

"Thank you; I shall be glad if you will."

Then they are alone, face to face; but, alas! not heart to heart ever any more.

Hero shuts and locks the door; then she speaks—

"I want to make all things plain to you. I want to act fairly and generously towards you. Assuming that you know nothing of the trouble that has come upon us I will tell you the whole story, but—won't you sit down?"

In silence he accepts the chair she pushes towards him; in silence he waits for her to speak again, wondering inwardly at the change in her.

She has always been half shy, half coquettish with him; now she is grave and calm, with a look of pride on her pure, sweet face, and in her clear eyes.

Swiftly and quietly she tells the tale she knows he has learned from her rival's lips, and concludes thus—

"Now tell me what an honourable man would do in such a case as yours?"

"He would fulfill his promise to the very letter."

"But what if the girl refused to allow such sacrifice?"

"What do you mean?" he asks, hoarsely; and at the expression of hope on his face, Hero can scarcely refrain from crying out in agony and reproach. But she has chosen her way, and will not swerve from it.

"You are free," she says in her cold, gentle tones. "Pray believe I will not link your life to mine—mine that is marred in its morning!"

"But," he says, seeking to secure her hands, "are you sure you mean this? Of course I should have preferred your name to be un tarnished; but you must not suffer for your father's crime."

She does not answer, but murmurs dreamily—"He was starving—his wife was dying—and it was such a little sum! His friend would never have suffered from the loss of it;" and then her calmness is broken through a moment.

Flinging her hands together passionately, she means—

"Oh, father! father! the punishment is too great for the offence!"

"You have not given me my answer," the young man says, gently. "Hero, will you not believe that, knowing what I know, I shall not esteem you less—that I will do my best to make you happy as my wife?"

"I believe all this," she answers, having regained her composure; "but this trial has taught me to read myself aright, and has opened my eyes to the fact that you do not love me. Hush! it is Hetty who fills your thoughts. Hetty who has your heart; and I am glad we have found out our mistake before it is too late."

"Do you mean to say you do not love me?" he questions, amazedly.

And for the sake of his peace she lies to him.

"Thank you for making matters so easy," he says, coolly accepting the situation, and refusing to see the anguish in her eyes. "I should have kept silence to the end."

"Acknowledge that my way is best," she says, with a smile.

"Infinitely best; although, Hero, I find it difficult to realise that you have changed. We always called you a model of constancy." (Oh, fool and blind, so to torture her loving heart! so to add to her already unendurable woe!) "I am half inclined," he says, with a gleeful laugh, "to feel disappointed in you, to wish you had not given me my freedom unasked."

"Don't; you make me feel so small in my own esteem. Aren't you anxious to see Hetty? You will find her in the next room, I believe;" and all the while her heart is crying, "Leave me, leave me; let me have one hour alone with my grief."

"Tell me," he says, "when you first began to think less of me?"

"How can I tell! Such things grow by degrees. Perhaps I set you too high for love; perhaps I thought you a god in 'perfection and truth; and now—well, now I have discovered that my idol has feet of clay, that I am not so faithful as I fancied myself to be. However that may be you are free, and we part friends."

"Yes," he says, eagerly, "friends, of course. I may kiss you, Hero?"

"Why not?" with hard flippancy, and lifts her face to his level.

Then she is alone; she hears him go from the

room, carefully closing the door, and, with a low wall, she falls on her knee beside a couch, sobbing. "He is mine by right of his promise! I only love him! She will break his heart! Oh, dear Heaven! what shall I do now! What shall I do!"

Later on she goes to her father. Hiding her face on his shoulder, she says, in a voice which she vainly strives to make calm,—

"Dear, it is all over between Herbert and me, and it is better so. He will marry Hetty, and I shall spend all my life with you. We will be very happy together."

Mr. Vyviah holds her closer.

"My poor child, my poor child!" he murmurs; "your lot is harder than mine, for you have lost all."

"Don't," she says, hurriedly; "I can bear anything but pity," and so, in silence, they sit together until midnight.

Then Hero rises, and wishing her father good-night, goes upstairs. Hetty opens her door as she passes.

"Stay a moment, Hero; I want your congratulations."

Her eyes are bright with malicious triumph, her handsome face flushed. Hero looks steadily at her a moment; then says, quietly,—

"You have built your happiness upon the ruin of mine. May you be proportionately happy," and so passes into her room to spend long hours in agonised prayers and unavailing entreaties.

In the morning Madam Norman comes.

"What is this I hear?" she asks, abruptly, and scans the white, small face with keen, but kindly eyes. "Herbert has told me a strange story."

"It is all true, dear Mrs. Norman. We have discovered our engagement was a mistake, and so have wisely ended it."

The sweet lips quiver, and the true eyes fill with tears. The old lady draws the girl to her.

"You have not changed," she says, huskily. "The fault has been all my boy's. Oh, you poor little Hero! What are you going to do with your life?"

(Continued on page 304)

THE LOST STAR.

—302—

CHAPTER XL.

ALVERLEY drew a deep breath as the star, which had cost him the greatest sorrow of his life, shone with the radiance of a meteor on the shabby green cloth.

"Oh! Ruby, my lost Ruby, success has come too late!" he thought to himself, as he contemplated its brilliance in profound and disappointing silence.

If it had but come a month or two ago, surely he might have won the day over the new lover, in the lane at Saunydale; but even now it was worth ten thousand times its value, for its discovery would remove the shadow from her life, though it could not lighten the cloud which had fallen on his own.

"Well, isn't it a real out-and-out?" exclaimed Godson, enthusiastically, as he bent over his treasure with glowing eyes. "Doesn't it twinkle and shine with a wicked wink of its own, and don't it look as if it ought to be in a palace?"

"Yes, it isn't bad," secretly drawing a star of mock diamonds out of his pocket. "How did you come by it?"

Godson put his finger to his nose, and looked cunning.

"I was hard enough to get it, and sharp enough to keep it too. When money runs short, and I want my dinner very bad, I sell some of the other things; but," shaking his head, "not this. I know a pretty lady, and I mean to put it one day in her soft, bright hair. It will look very well, and she's sure to be pleased. Don't you think she's sure to be pleased?"

"Quite sure. But where is she?"

All the brightness faded from his face; his cheeks seemed to sink, as they turned a sickly yellow, and his restless eyes grew heavy and dull.

"I can't find her," he said, hoarsely, but I mean to one day, if I spend all my life in looking for her."

Alverley suddenly placed a photograph of Baby St. Heliers, which he had procured by a stratagem, in front of Godson's eyes.

The effect was electrical. The poor fellow, whose delusion had only gathered strength with time, clutched at it wildly, almost sobbing with delight.

He caught it from Alverley's hand, and pressed it over and over again to his lips, the tears running down his cheeks, his sunken chest heaving.

Strongly objecting to the desecration of Baby's picture, and yet conscious of a fellow-feeling with the crazed lover, Alverley changed the stars as quickly as possible, and then insisted upon regaining possession of the photograph.

Godson hung on to it as a drowning man to a spar, entreating to be allowed to keep it if only for half-a-day.

"You don't know what she is to me," crying like a child. "She's an angel—a goddess! I could lie down on the ground for her to walk over me. I could follow her through fire or ice. I could be so happy with only one word or one smile from her pretty lips. I could die, indeed I could, to-morrow to make her be as she was before, with everything bright and pretty around her. She ought to be the queen of the land; and I've heard tell she's nought but a poor hard-worked governess. Oh! let me keep it, sir!"

"I can't, it is the only one I have," replacing it inside his waistcoat, as the only place that was safe from Godson's eagle fingers. "But I will tell you what she would wish if she were here"—the other looked up eagerly—"that you should go back to your home in Devonshire, and wait there till she comes to see you."

Godson shook his head.

"She wouldn't come. I waited till I could wait no longer. I followed her down to a big house, and saw her on the ice, but she took no notice of me. She was laughing with a great hulking fellow, who took no more care of her than if she had been a cow. And then she was thrown down, and they couldn't get her skates off; but I knew how, and I longed to carry her in my arms over the snow, but the others got between."

He stopped, lost in thought.

Alverley plied him from the bottom of his heart, as he stood in a listless attitude, leaning against the table, arrayed in his tattered dressing-gown.

They were both wrecked on the same rock, but Providence had granted him better wisdom wherewith to weather the storm.

As he shook hands with him, he left a ten-pound note in Godson's hand, in case dinners should run short again before his father found him out.

The policemen were told simply to keep an eye on him, to see that he came to no harm, and the warrant was torn up as wholly unnecessary.

After making himself a little more presentable in his own lodgings, he drove to his father's town-house in Chesterfield-gardens, and caught his mother and sister as they were just on the point of starting for an evening party.

"Where is my father?" he inquired directly, after embracing them both.

"In the library. What do you want with him? Has anything happened?" and the Countess looked anxiously into his worn face.

Disipation had told upon his health; there were dark circles round his eyes, and his cheeks were colourless. There was enough in his appearance to make a mother's heart sad.

"I have good news for you, but I don't want to have to tell the story twice. Oh, should you mind running down to him, and telling him that I have something important to communicate. I wouldn't ask you, but he would come up for you, and not for me."

"Lazy boy, that is only an excuse!" said Lady Clementina, with a smile, as in her gorgeous dress she walked slowly across the velvet-pile carpet, surveying herself in every mirror that she passed on her way to the door.

"You look tired out already!" and Lady Chester pushed back a stray lock from his forehead, wishing that he were not such a stranger in his own home. "If you are not coming with us, I wish you would oblige me for once, and go straight home to bed."

"Bed!" he echoed, with a laugh, "why I should think I was dreadfully ill if I did, and Phillips would assuredly run for the doctor."

"You will be ill if you don't. Oh, my boy, what would I not give to see you happily married!" laying her hand fondly on his arm.

"Between you, you have done the best you could to ruin my only chance. Oh! here's my father," going to meet him, and shaking hands, though there was but little cordiality between them. "I won't detain you longer than I can help."

The Countess sank down on a sofa, Clementina on an easy chair. Alverley threw himself into an arm chair, whilst the Earl, with a reserved expression on his haughty, patrician face, occupied his favourite position on the hearth rug.

All listened with rapt attention whilst the story was told, interrupting every now and then with a question or exclamation; and the tears were standing in Lady Chester's eyes long before it was finished.

"So here it is, after all these months, rescued from the clutches of a kleptomaniac!" and he laid the long lost star on his mother's knee.

The Earl stepped forward, and examined it curiously, as if expecting to find it a fraud.

"Instead of playing off a juggler's trick on the man," he said, coldly, "you would have done much better to have placed the matter in the hands of the police, and had him arrested in due form."

"I think it would have been cruel to drag the poor fellow before a court of justice, when he could not be considered accountable for his actions. The next thing to be done is to communicate with his father, and to give him a hint that he had better come up at once and look after him."

"I can get his address from Miss St. Heliers—Violet, I mean," as her son looked up in surprise. "My dear boy, I don't know how to thank you enough for all you have done. I am sure I never expected to see my star again."

"Remember it is to be kept in the strong-room for the future," said the Earl, severely; its recovery having reminded him forcibly of the false position in which he had placed himself, as well as the unfortunate girl whom he had suspected of its theft.

"Some one ought to write to Miss Ruby St. Heliers," and Lady Clementina looked across at her mother. "Poor thing, how sorry I was for her!"

Lord Alverley smiled. "She is not a poor thing now, but very rich—mistress, I believe, of one of the finest estates in Berkshire."

"Have you seen her?" breathlessly from his mother and sister, whilst three pair of eyes were fixed on him with eager curiosity.

"Yes, I saw her," speaking very slowly; "but she would have nothing to say to me—evidently the family was out of favour."

"Did you tell Violet? She is longing to know where her sister is," and Lady Clementina rose from her seat.

"No, it was her secret, not mine; and I only found her out by accident."

"The horses have been waiting long enough," for the Earl.

"Yes, and I must be off," said Alverley, starting up. "Good-bye, mother; goodness only knows when we shall meet again."

"Are you going to-morrow?" with an unmistakable accent of regret. "And we have seen nothing of you for the last two months."

"Come with us to-night. You must have had a card; and the Dimsdales used to be great friends of yours."

"My dear girl, I have half a hundred things to see at."

"Never mind. Phillips will manage very well without you, and you know you wouldn't do anything more to-night. Come for once."

Black sheep like to be petted, and the affectionate treatment was the more prized, because it was unusual. Alverley yielded, perhaps because she had said a kind word for Ruby; but on the express stipulation that he should be released in half-an-hour. It was years since he had been out with his mother and sister, and he felt quite odd as he took his place on the back seat of the carriage.

Lady Chester's heart beat with motherly pride as she preceded her son into the brilliantly-lighted drawing-room. Oh! if Alverley would always be as he was to-night, what a happy creature she would be—almost without a care in the world!

Violet St. Heliers was there, looking unutterably charming in a simple toilette. The unfortunate collapse of her love-dream lent a certain mournfulness to her eyes, which made them more bewitching than ever.

Harold Jerningham was in attendance, and his astonishment knew no bounds when he saw his brother appear as one of the family party; but there was no time for explanation. Lord Alverley walked straight across the room, and begged for the honour of a dance. When his turn came, he led his partner out on to the balcony long before the walls were finished, and, placing her in the most comfortable chair he could find, leant against the balustrade in an indolent but graceful attitude, looking down at her beauty with wistful eyes.

The softened light of the stars made the resemblance to Ruby more striking than ever, and a wild, inevitable longing seemed to rise in the depths of his heart.

"I am going to write to your sister to-night," he said, after a pause. "Have you any message?"

"Do you know her address?" looking up in great surprise.

"Yes; I found her out by accident."

"Oh! Why didn't you tell me before? I would have given anything to know it!"

"It was her secret, and I was bound in honour not to tell it."

"Then tell me now!" clasping her hands impatiently. "I am dying to know where she is, how she is, and if she has quite forgotten me!"

"She is rich and happy!"

"Rich! Impossible!"

"Not at all, if she married a rich man!"

"But she isn't married! Lord Alverley," breathlessly, "she isn't your wife!"

He shook his head.

Violet felt as if she would die of shame.

"Of course, it wasn't likely! I don't mean that, but—"

"Not likely; no. Stars don't willingly make their home in the gutter." A long pause, "You have not asked me what my good news is. The diamond star is found, and I felt that I must let your sister know."

"Thank Heaven!" with the utmost fervour.

"Oh! Lord Alverley," her eyes sparkling with delight, "now she can come back to us, and never—never go away again. You have made me so happy, I could almost cry."

He frowned, as if the pleasure in which he was not to share was almost too much for him to bear.

"She won't be the same to you. Married women are always different to single."

"But is she married?" dubiously, "I feel so sure she would have told me!"

"Do you judge her by yourself?"

A crimson blush rose to her delicate cheeks.

"That was not kind of you."

"Excuse me! I said it without a thought. I did, upon my honour! Of course the cases are very different, and you were completely under Marston's thumb!"

She shivered.

"Lord Alverley," in a low voice, "I daren't ask any of the others, but do you ever hear of him?"

"Nothing to his good! You know what happened, when he tried to decoy you to another meeting by that lying advertisement about the Lost Star!"

Violet shook her head.

"Harold met him instead of you, and gave him the soundest thrashing that man ever had."

Her lips quivered, and the tears came into her eyes, and hung on her long lashes. "After that we made the club too hot to hold him—the fellows in his regiment fought shy of him. He sold out in consequence, and, finding England did not agree with him, gave the Continent the benefit of his society. No doubt I shall rub shoulders with him at Monte Carlo."

"Are you going away?"

"To-morrow. Is there anything I can do for you?" bending down with such a winning smile as might have stolen the heart out of any woman's breast.

She hesitated, clasping her hands tightly together, and lifting her troubled face to meet the sympathy in his. "Only this, if you meet him don't be hard on him. Try to draw him back—not drive him on to recklessness and sin."

"You should ask that of someone else. Don't you know that I am one of the sinners myself?"

"I ask it of you!" she said, with a sweet smile. "Ruby always told me that you had the noblest heart in the world!"

"Did she say that?" very eagerly. "Angels are always merciful, but they make mistakes!"

"You won't be away very long."

"That depends upon how long I can manage to keep away. Don't you know that every hour I spend abroad will seem like twenty."

"Then why do you go?"

"Ah! why, indeed! Here is your next partner, so I will wish you good-bye!" He clasped her hand tightly. "When I am safely out of the way, ask your sister why she threw me over!"

Before she could answer he had vanished into the drawing-room, and she was left with a fascinating young Guardsman, who was so well satisfied with himself that he never perceived that her answers were somewhat incoherent.

CHAPTER XLII

THE clock was striking two when Lord Alverley finally regained his lodgings, and sat down to write a letter to Ruby St. Heliers.

What ages it seemed since that day when he had written to ask for a private meeting, and she had been far too indignant to send him any answer.

Heigho! He did not imagine then that she would make a capital match, and leave him out in the cold! No; he thought she would soon be desperately in love with himself, and he trusted confidently to his own powers to retain her heart for ever if it were once captured!

"My dear Mrs. Howard," he began, and stopped. It seemed so strange to address her as a married woman—so strange not to put "My own Ruby!" He must be either tender or stiff—the friendly medium was impossible. "Through the confession of Anna Gower, whom you may remember as housemaid at the chase, the lost star was traced to Frederick Godson, the kleptomaniacal son of the Devonshire farmer. I rescued it from his possession by an undignified stratagem, and placed it in my mother's hands this evening."

"I saw your sister to-night, and she is dying to hear from you. Do not keep her in suspense if you can help it, for I can answer for it that it is very unpleasant."

"Hoping to see you on my return to England,
—Yours,
ALVERLEY."

Never more must he put "devotedly." He threw down his pen in disgust. What an absurd kind of letter to write to the only girl he had ever loved! He had half a mind to tear it up; but no, if he wrote another it would be just the same. It might as well go as it was. The wife of a Berkshire squire would not be interested enough in the writer to pick it to pieces. How little he knew!

When Ruby received the letter late on the following evening, her heart leapt for joy at the sight of the well-remembered handwriting. Even the absurdity of the address could not damp her delight as her eyes ran eagerly down the thick paper till they reached the simple "Yours, Alverley," at the bottom.

If Mrs. Wood had not been staying with her, she would have raised that bold signature to her lips. It was all over—the long, weary waiting, the hopeless longing! She could hold up her head once more as the stainless daughter of an honourable father! She could do what she liked, she could go where she liked, she could love with the whole power of her heart, and be loved again in return! She could see her sister once more, and be welcomed back into the charmed circle of relations and friends!

All gates seemed to be suddenly opened to her, all barriers broken down! Freed from every fetter that had cramped and spoilt her life she could make it glorious and happy as a dream!

The colour came and went in her cheeks; her eyes shone through a mist of joyous tears! For a while she kept her great happiness to herself, hugging it, as it were, to her breast, and then she slipped down on the ground by the old lady's side, and laid her head on her knee.

"Oh, Mrs. Wood, I am so happy!"

Mrs. Wood dropped her spectacles, and looked at her in surprise.

"My dear," laying her withered hand fondly on the soft brown hair, "are you going to be married?"

"No! but I can go back to my own friends and my own people! The star is found—and not a soul on earth can look down on me with scorn!"

"I don't think any one did. But who found it?" her curiosity sharpened by the look of transcendent happiness in the lovely eyes.

"Lord Alverley! I knew that he would do it, if every one else failed!" with open exultation in her voice, which refused to be hidden.

A troubled look came across the serenity of the aged face.

"My dear, have nothing to do with him! He is a bad young man—a sad care to his father and another!"

"Ah, you don't know him!" with a wilful shake of her head. "He has the best, the noblest heart in the world! But I mustn't talk any more, for I've got a letter to write!"

Rising quickly she kissed the old lady on both cheeks, and, crossing the room with a light step, sat down by the writing-table. For some time she remained perfectly still, her head resting on her hand, a happy smile on her lips, and a dreamy look in her eyes! Then she took up her pen and began to write.

"The Beeches, Sunnysdale, Berks."

"DEAR LORD ALVERLEY,—

"Your letter this evening causes me the greatest joy of my life. You don't know what it is to me to feel that I am no longer an outcast from my own kith and kin. The last year has been so truly desolate, that I needed all my courage to bear it, and now I feel as if the happiness of seeing my sister and all my friends would be almost too much for me. You address me as Mrs. Howard, but I assure you that the husband with whom you endow me is purely mythical—my dear friend, Mr. Mackinlay (he knew my poor father, years ago and loved him like a brother) having left me his fortune, without such an inconvenient encumbrance."

"Hoping that I shall soon have an opportunity of thanking you in person for all the great trouble which I am sure you have taken.—Ever yours, gratefully,

"RUBY ST. HELIERS."

Was it too warm, after their last parting, and his cold letter! No. His letter was only cold because he thought she was married and faithless, and now surely he would come back to her by the first train he could catch from Paddington. She had lost the evening post, so he would not get it till the next afternoon or evening. It was not likely that he would reach The Beeches till the day after, and tolerably late

in the day, as he never got up early in the morning.

Utterly unconscious that as she was talking of him to Mrs. Wood, he had already started with Lord Fielding from Charlton-cross, she watched the hours go by with glad impatience, for every one that passed in its slow flight, brought their two loving hearts closer together. Not a shadow of doubt crossed her mind; as surely as the sun set and rose again, so surely would he come back to her at the first word of invitation. The stately old rooms, with the tapestry curtains, and cedar-wood furniture, were decked with flowers in every vase and corner. Trailing creepers of every variety of colour and beauty hung from brackets on the wall, and a bank of exquisite exotics, with a background of looking-glass, hid the quaint old fire-places. Ruby flitted about the gardens like a restless butterfly. Not a word had she told of her hopes and expectations. "It was too hot for a drive," she said, as an excuse for stopping at home, "so Symonds had better exercise the horses in the morning."

But morning grew into afternoon, and afternoon into evening, and still he tarried. A number of carriages had driven up to the door in the course of the day, making her heart beat fast, and a throbbing sound came in her ears, but they only contained grave old county dowagers—slow and pompous and polite, whose conversation in its even flow was scarcely more exciting than the continual dropping of rain. Terribly disappointed she could scarcely eat any dinner, but she struggled to keep up an appearance of cheerfulness lest Mrs. Wood should guess what was the matter. After all he might be away from home, or ill, or detained by a forgotten engagement.

To raise her spirits she read over two letters which she received before dinner (in answer to letters of her own), one from Violet, radiant with joy, and full of entreaties that she would come to Hyde Park-gardens at once, as her aunt particularly wished to see her, and her sister was dying to throw her arms round her neck—the other from Mrs. Upton, with the heartiest congratulations on the termination of her self-imposed decree of banishment, and condolence with her mother at the loss of such a valued friend.

The words of love and kindness were very welcome, and she determined to accept Lady Augusta's invitation at once. Come what would she must be happy, with Violet to talk to—Violet to look at once more.

The first thing the next morning she sent a telegram to Lady Augusta, to tell her to expect her by the five o'clock train, and gave her the necessary orders to her household.

Mrs. Wood had already declared her intention of returning to her own home, so Ruby dropped her at the Poplars on the way to the station. Her heart was very full as she took her place in a first-class carriage, with her maid beside her, her footman waiting on the platform, her handsome carriage, with the finest brown horses in the county, just outside the gates.

God had been very good to her. He had given her plenty where she had expected nothing—He had raised up friends where she had looked for foes—and He had watched over the fatherless with a mercy that never failed. How different was this journey to that other, when penniless, except for a half-year's salary in her pocket, she had fled from a house where she had been treated like a felon, with no hope for the future, and a thousand cares flying after her, like birds of prey waiting to pick her bones!

Lord Alverley had come to her, it was true; but distracted by doubt and fear, his love had been a torment as well as a pleasure, and she had left him, feeling that it was her duty never to see him again.

Now she was rich, honoured and respected, with an assured position, a stately home, and without a spot on her name or fame.

Instead of accepting a home from her aunt she could offer one to her sister, where they might both live together happy in each other's true affection, and in the power of doing good to those who suffered.

When the smoke of London appeared in the

distance, she had forgotten everything else in the thought of her sister.

Poor child! how utterly miserable she must have been when brought back a disappointed bride to the house in Hyde Park-gardens.

How she must have longed for her to come and comfort her, as she had always comforted her before, in every trouble of her life.

The deception towards herself was forgiven already—the remembrance of it was washed away by the tears that had fallen since. And it was with the old love, undimmed in her eyes, that Ruby thrust her head out of the window to see if her sister had come to meet her.

Yes, there she was, looking into every carriage but the right one, with a happy smile of expectation on her lips—a pretty, graceful figure, in a dainty summer dress, with a tall footman standing erect as a pillar behind her.

"Violet, Violet!" she cried.

Oh, the glad look that leapt from face to face, as, heedless of the busy crowd around them, they kissed each other again and again.

The maid, Marianne Simmons, who was the plot of propriety, was immensely shocked by this want of decorum in her mistress, but found some consolation in the rigid attitude of the footman, who looked perfectly unconscious of what was happening under his nose.

When the long greetings were over, the luggage, with the name of Howard, for the last time on every label, was placed in a cab under charge of the maid, and the two sisters took their places in the carriage.

They could scarcely believe that they had got to their destination when the coachman drew up at 20, Hyde Park-gardens, the time had passed so quickly in conversation. Lady Augusta, who was waiting at the top of the stairs, received the returned runaway with open arms; whilst Sir Arthur, a fine military-looking middle-aged man looked at her with some curiosity, as if he expected to find some evidence of eccentricity in her appearance.

Apparently the scrutiny was satisfactory, for he stretched out his hand, and shook hers warmly.

"Welcome home," he said, kindly. "We have been very anxious about you during the last year!"

"Uncle, she's rich—enormously rich; think of that!" cried Violet, as she followed Ruby into the drawing-room.

"Dear me! Has she married, or murdered, somebody down in Berkshire?"

"Neither; but somebody died, and left her all his fortune!"

"Very good of him—evidently a case of witchcraft. When we know each other a little better," turning to Ruby, "perhaps you will tell us your secret!"

"If you hadn't been the most ungallant man that ever was," exclaimed Lady Augusta, "you would have looked in her face, and said you had found it!"

"Perhaps I thought it, but did not say it."

"And perhaps you didn't, which is more likely. Have a cup of tea, Ruby; I am sure you must be dying of thirst," and Lady Augusta moved towards the small table, on which the five o'clock tea apparatus was set out. "Cream and sugar!"

"No sugar, thanks. When I have drunk my tea, I will tell you why I have come back."

"We heard all about it; and I mean to give Lord Chester a very big piece of my mind!"

"Better not, my dear," said her husband, prudently. "You might as well talk to a stone wall as to Chester. I dare say he will fight shy of us for some time. And meanwhile this long disappearance of our niece, and her romantic return as a millionaire, gives a new interest to our prosaic old house, which is proud to shelter such a heroine under its roof!"

CHAPTER XLII.

"Here's a letter for you, old fellow!" said Lord Fielding, putting his head in at the door of Alverley's sitting-room in the hotel at Nice.

"Follow me to the club when you feel inclined!"

The Viscount nodded, as he stooped to pick up the letter, which had fallen on the polished boards.

Without looking at the address, he carried it with him out on to the balcony, where he threw himself down on a pile of cushions, and proceeded to light a cigarette.

"Confounded nuisance Marston turning up! I know if I meet him we shall come to a scrimmage; and that won't be doing what that pretty girl asked me. She wanted me to give him a leg up on to that particularly lively horse called 'duty'!" smoking leisurely as he lay on his back. "But," with a slight smile, "if I tell him to follow my example, he'll only get to the dogs by a different road to his own. By-the-by, where's that letter? It may be from Clem; more likely from the governor, with a general blow-up all round. Hulloa!" as a sudden change came over his face, and he tore open the envelope in frantic haste.

"Ruby—Ruby St.rollers! What does it mean? Good Heavens! what a fool I've been!" striking back on the cushions, as if overcome by the thought of his own folly. "She was humbugging me all the while, and I never saw through it! Dolt—idiot—consummate ass! Mistress of the Beches! Of course she might be that, single or married. And the change of name was just what she would be likely to think of, instead of dragging her father's through the mud."

"I must get back to England in less than no time, or else she'll think I don't love her half enough! Oh! my lost star, I'll have you at last!"

He scrambled to his feet on the point of calling for Phillips, but suddenly recollected an appointment for that evening at Monte Carlo. Muttering a curse, as he recognized the necessity of putting off his journey to the next day, he resumed his former position; and, with the precious letter stowed away safely next door to her photograph inside his waistcoat, abandoned himself to a delicious reverie.

In a few short days they would be together, he and she, with no scruples to part them, no Quixotic notions of honour to stand between them. Once more he would hold her close to his heart and press his happy lips to hers, and know that in a few months at latest she would be his.

He had wooed her penniless and forsaken. Now she was rich and surrounded by friends; but that was no reason why the heir to the Earldom of Chester and vast estates in several counties should be afraid to press his suit.

His motives could not be mistaken; and surely from her note, cautious though it was through maiden modesty, she would be rather glad to call him back.

And then, as the sea sparkled and coquetted with the sunshining, and the voices from the crowded Promenade des Anglais below rose in a mingled murmur of repartee and laughter, and life passed on in the joyous unconventional fashion of the favourite southern city, a shadow fell across the heart of the solitary watcher on the balcony.

He remembered the vices which had stained his soul—the wretched habits of dissipation, thrown off for a while under a better influence, but resumed too recklessly in a fit of despair—the long list of follies and sins which he had misnamed pleasure—and his courage failed him as he thought of offering such a life as this to a pure-hearted, stainless girl!

He was not fit to touch the hem of her dress, much less her lovely lips! He could not give her up—that was certain. But would she be happy with him when she knew what sort of a man he really was, and learnt to despise him, as despise him she must, when her eyes were once opened! He hid his face from the light and the sun as if they shamed him.

He had rarely indulged in self-examination before, and the task was especially unpleasant. What had possessed him during all these years he could not imagine. The flavour having gone out of the forbidden fruit, he might well wonder

why he had taken so much trouble to pick it; but the doubt was, if he would always find it tasteless, and never climb after it again. Never, surely, with an angel by his side!

Happiness had softened the heart in which there had ever been good qualities mixed with the bad; and with quiet gravity he decided that as it was useless to bother himself about the past, it was chiefly necessary to turn his attention to the future. When Ruby was his wife, he would try to fashion his life after a more exalted pattern, and live for some better, higher purpose than the mere enjoyment of the passing hour. He would not turn a preacher or a saint; neither would he give up going to the Derby, Ascot or Sandown Park, or to the polo or pigeon-shooting at Hurlingham, &c. He would enjoy a run with the hounds as much as ever, and a tramp after red-deer over the moors, but he would live like an honest English gentleman, trying to do some good to his fellow-creatures, and never be obliged to fear the pure, sweet glance of his wife's eyes.

"You lazy beggar! Why didn't you turn up!" And Lord Fielding strolled out on to the balcony with his hat in his hand, as if overcome with the heat. "Bolton and Templeton will settle the match with us to night. It is to come off to-morrow at five o'clock, according to the present arrangement."

"I'm off to-morrow, so you must manage to do without me; perhaps Vivian would take my place," and Alverley lighted another cigarette.

"Not to be thought of. He can't shoot straighter than his own nose, which is as crooked as that woman's hat!" nodding towards a lady who was passing in a carriage. "But why are you going to hook it! Bad news from England!"

"No, not bad exactly, but I must be there."

"You must be here, on the contrary. Look here, Alverley," leaning on the balcony but turning an aggrieved countenance towards his friend. "I won't stand being left in the lurch. We may pull off the match a little earlier to oblige you, and then you can go by the evening train. It's very good of me, for the sun always does for my shooting, and I shan't see a pigeon if it is blowing like to-day."

"How soon shall I be there?" said Alverley, meditatively.

"Long before you are wanted, I'll bet. Come and have some dinner, or we shall miss our train to Monte Carlo."

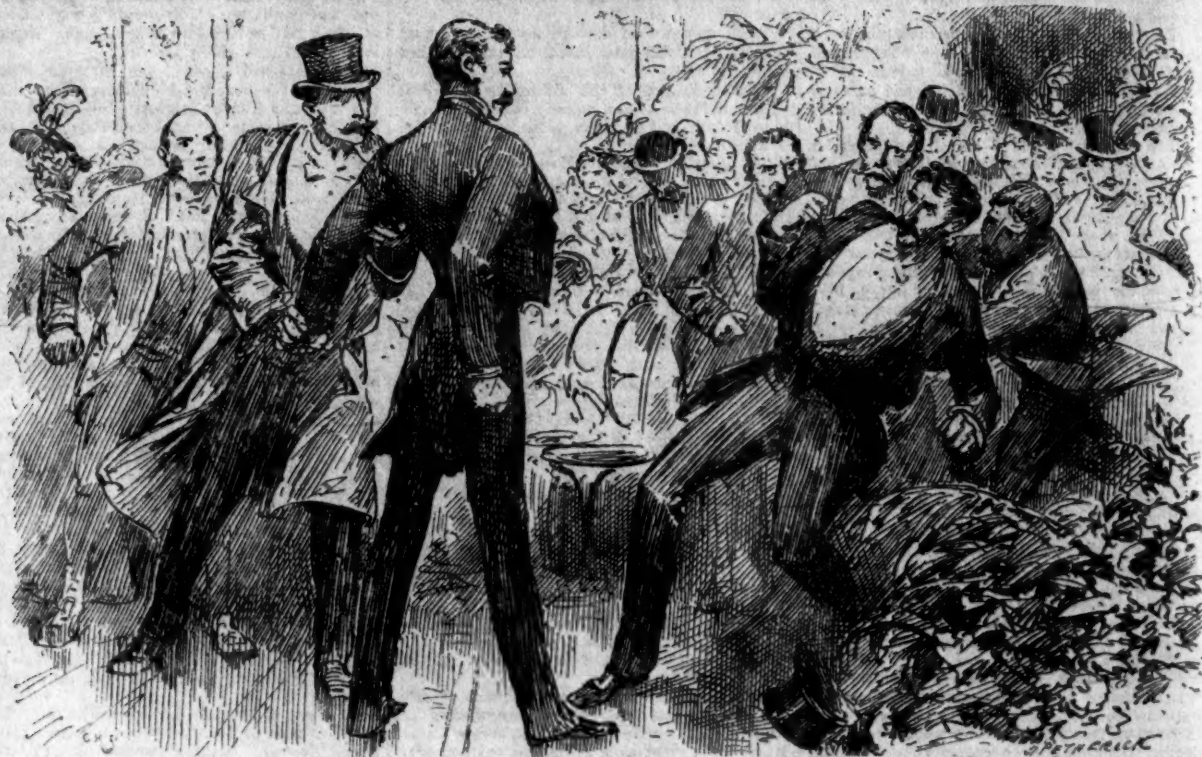
It was a lovely evening. The soft ripple of the tideless sea murmured a loving greeting to the slumbering shore. The little children, who had run bare-footed after the miniature waves, had been kidnapped by their nurses and put to bed. But whilst the innocents were sleeping, the wicked were awake. Outside, the stars were shining in silent majesty, but with a warmer ray than in northern climates, as if from their far-off thrones they were interested in the fate of the struggling mortals below, and striving by their light and sweetness to woo them to some thought of Heaven.

The air was heavy with the perfume of flowers, whilst a breath of wind rustled the wide-spreading leaves of the palms. A ray of moonlight rested on the distant summits of the Alps, and down in the valley a thousand lights were twinkling amongst the shadows; but in the gardens around, under the shade of roses and palms, there were many nooks and corners, where, unseen in the friendly darkness, love's whispers could be unheard by the passing crowd.

"Stop a moment, Fielding," said Alverley, as in company with several others just arrived by the train they reached the plateau in front of the celebrated "Temple of Play." "Look at that view, isn't it delicious! Paradise regained, and brought to France, instead of"—with some hesitation—"Arabia."

"If so, the gates of Heaven and hell are pretty close together. Turn your back on that, and look on this."

Doors and windows were wide open, streams of light and music poured out upon the lawn, and under the lights were gathered the motley crowds, drawn thither from every corner of the globe, either by the thirst for excitement or the



ALVERLEY SPRANG FORWARD LIKE AN ENRAGED TIGER, AND STRUCK MARSTON A STINGING BLOW ON THE MOUTH.

equally insatiable greed of gain. The monotonous call of the croupiers, the exultant chuckle of the winners, the despairing groan of the ruined, the idle chit-chat of the lookers-on; the music, the laughter, and the sighs—all joined together in a confused medley. A feeling of repugnance to the wretched scene of man's degradation, came over Lord Alverley; and if it had not been for his friend, who drew him on, he would willingly have stayed outside and smoked a quiet cigarette amongst the roses.

This night, for the first time since his earliest boyhood, gambling had lost its zest, and he was far from being in his usually desperate hurry to see how much he could lose.

Fortune rarely smiled upon him, and he more often than not left the gaming-table with empty pockets; and yet it had never lost its charm until to-night.

Even as he crossed the threshold he looked over his shoulder and gave a lingering look at the stars.

Some subtle instinct seemed to draw him back, but habit was too strong for him, and he yielded to the pressure of Fielding's arm.

"Confoundedly hot!" he grumbled.
"Yes; but we shan't feel it so much after the first. There's Templeton—he looks pretty well grilled already. Let us make for him. Ugh! how that woman stinks of patchouli!"

Elbowing his way through the crowd, Lord Fielding made a capital pioneer for Alverley, who had a constitutional aversion to any violent exertion, except in the way of sport.

By the time he came up to them in his leisurely fashion the preliminaries of the match were nearly settled, and Captain Templeton was saying,—

"Baton has been called by important business to Rome or Paris—I really forget which—but he said his friend, Captain Marston, would take his place."

"Oh, dear, no!" said Alverley, quietly. "I object to that arrangement!"

Captain Templeton looked surprised, and

Captain Marston, who was standing close behind him, stepped forward.

"On what plea, may I ask?"

"You need not ask—because you know!" looking at him calmly, from head to foot.

"Marston is a first-rate shot!" and Templeton looked uneasily from one to the other. "He beat the American the week before last into a cocked hat!"

"Alverley told me before dinner that he wished to start for England to-morrow; so, perhaps, after all," said Lord Fielding, "we had better put off the match till he comes back."

"Perhaps so," said Alverley, not wishing, for Violet St. Heller's sake, to be drawn too far. "Whether you do or not—" began Marston, with a scowl.

"Don't make a fool of yourself!" said Templeton, in an under-tone. "He's not the man to stand any nonsense!" trying to drag him away.

Marston shook him off, and placed himself in front of his former friend.

"I demand an explanation!"

"You may—but it is unnecessary."

"It is not; and I will have it!" his chest heaving with passion.

"Do you want me to tell the whole room what I think of you?" slowly, at it in expostulation.

"Yes!" in a loud voice, as his excitement broke through all bounds. "And I'll tell them in return, how, under your own father's roof, you made dishonourable love to Miss St.—"

He never got any further, for Alverley sprang forward like an enraged tiger, and hit him a stinging blow on the mouth.

Marston tottered, and would have fallen, but for those who were behind, and Fielding seized Lord Alverley's arm in a grasp of iron.

Women screamed, men pushed eagerly forward to see what the scuffle was about, and even the players cast a glance over their shoulders, roused for an instant from the delirium of play.

Captain Marston wiped the blood from his lip, and looked with flashing eyes at Alverley, who

stood perfectly calm and composed in the centre of the crowd, quietly waiting for the sequel.

"After this," he said, as distinctly as his swollen lip would allow him, "you cannot refuse me the satisfaction of a gentleman!"

Lord Alverley bowed with careless indifference.

"No; although I do not consider you one!"

Captain Marston turned away without a word, though his face was white with suppressed passion, beckoning to Templeton to follow him.

"Fielding, I know I can trust to you, and let it be arranged as quickly as possible; for, come what will, I must start for England to-morrow."

"Of course—I'm at your service; but, you know, you needn't fight him. Duelling is an exploded idea!"

"In England—but not here. I couldn't show my face in Nice or Cannes, or any of these places, if I let it pass. Besides," with a frown, "they might have thought it true!"

"And it wasn't!" with a quick look into his face.

"It was the foulest lie that was ever spoken!" The girl—somewhat hoarsely—"is an angel, more fit for Heaven than earth. Come out of this stifling hole. I'm nearly choking!"

He stood for a moment in perfect silence contemplating the scene before him. The earth had never seemed so fair to him before. What was there in this night of all others that gave it its special charm? Perhaps it was because it might be his last!

(To be continued.)

THE oldest and most curious herbarium in the world is the Egyptian Museum at Cairo. It consists of crowns, garlands, wreaths, and bouquets of flowers, all taken from the ancient tombs of Egypt, most of the examples being in excellent condition. Nearly all the flowers have been identified. They cannot be less than 3,000 years old.



SPENCER BLYTHE PRESSED FORWARD, AND ASSISTED BERRY TO MOUNT THE STEPS.

BROWN AS A BERRY.

CHAPTER XV.

THE Honourable Spencer Blythe is a man famous for his conquests, notorious for his abuse of them. Where he is best known, his attentions are considered to compromise any woman who is unlucky enough to attract him; and so impervious is he to rebuff, that often those who would willingly dispense with his notice receive unmerited reprobation.

He himself rather glories in his evil character. It amuses him to see the flutter of dismay his advent arouses among the chaperones, and the ill-concealed jealousy of the husbands whose trust in their wives is not unconditional.

And, as a rule, it is these last who have most to fear, for Mr. Blythe seldom condescends to the bread-and-butter miseries of society, unless they have some unusual piquancy to recommend them—which, perhaps, fortunately for them, is not often the case.

Berry's reception of his opening civilities, piques and interests him, and her subsequent fright at what she has done only makes him smile, and resolve more decidedly to go on with the game.

He, of all men, well knows how entirely a single indiscretion can put a girl in a man's power, and he is not one to forego his advantages or to give her credit for the childish thoughtlessness which alone prompted it.

At luncheon he does not address her, and this reassures her, notwithstanding that he still makes a point of reaching her each thing as she requires it, rendering the position of the waiter behind her almost a sinecure.

The afternoon she spends with Mrs. Sowerby; but in the evening, when she goes into dinner, she feels a little dismay at seeing Captain Sowerby in friendly discourse with the stranger. The next moment he is introduced to her, and his meaning smile, as he bows in acknowledgment, makes her

regret more than ever her mistake in putting herself so at his mercy. Instinctively she feels she will not receive much grace at his hands.

"Perry's attendant must not be less vigilant in her service now that he has received a name and an identity," he remarks, smiling, and striving to win an answering glance from the demure little face bent so intently over her soup-plate.

"I do not understand you," coldly.

"Then your memory is a short one for the fairy-tales you tell!"

"I dare say; I do not pretend to any talent that way."

"Of course you do not pretend anything; ladies never do," with an almost imperceptible sneer; but slight as it is Berry detects it, and flushes a deeper, angrier crimson.

Captain Carew, watching her from another table, wonders what could have been said to cause the brilliant colour which gives to the varying face its only lacking charm, the bared throat and arms of creamy whiteness making it more conspicuous still.

Mr. Blythe, too, is not slow to admire, and grows more ardent still in his proposed pursuit. That she should treat him with disdain only adds to his eagerness; a speedy success has little excitement in it, and he prefers beginning with a little aversion.

"It is your first visit to India?" he goes on questioningly, as she does not reply.

"Yes," laconically.

"If you take such glowing cheeks there you will find yourself in disgrace. A committee of party-faced ladies will sit upon you at once and condemn you without a hearing."

"India is a queer place if personalities are indulged in there—and approved."

"India is a queer place," he answers, calmly, evading what was meant as a rebuke.

"And the people?" with an involuntary smile at his sang froid.

"People are the same everywhere, I suppose. Perhaps they are a little fonder of gaily, scandal, and the other ills to which our flesh is heir."

"Not a glowing account."

"If you want that you must go to someone younger and more enthusiastic. I have outlived my illusions."

"Then I am sorry for you," decidedly.

"Thank you very much. You mean that no amount of knowledge acquired can compensate one for the disappointment that is gained with it?"

"Yes, that is what I meant, but I don't think I could have expressed it so well."

"You do yourself an injustice. I am confident you could do anything, even to remembering the fairy tale you told this morning."

The malicious smile which accompanies this makes Berry draw up her little head in proud silence. She had been thawing to him before, but freezes again at this fresh allusion to what she wishes to forget.

"Captain Sowerby," turning to her other neighbour, "is not the band playing very loudly to-night?"

Captain Sowerby assents, protesting he is almost deafened by the sounds, which, in point of fact, are less obtrusive than they had been the night before; but then civilization has its demands, and necessitates the exchange of many meaningless sentences.

Mr. Blythe, who is not soon abashed, goes on easily,—

"Do you know I was interested in your story? All fairy tales have a great attraction for me, and, of course, especially yours. I—I am so fond of cats!"

He looks so droll as he says this, and so unlike anyone who would in reality possess the tastes he had professed, that Berry laughs, and then inconsequently flies into a passion with him for having made her lose her standing-point of dignified disapprobation.

"Why do you tease me so? If you will persist in mentioning it I"—she says, with a queer mixture of childish wrath and womanly indignation—"I will never speak to you again!"

He is grave instantly.

"Agreed; let it be a bond between us, a secret not to be divulged," he murmurs, with a degree of familiarity that maddens the girl still more as she cannot reasonably object to what she has herself proposed. She has gone deeper and deeper into the mire, and the bold, brown eyes which rest so admiringly upon her tell her plainly that he knows it. To have a private understanding with an acquaintance of a few hours; how much lower is she to fall!

She pushes away her dessert plate and rises from the table.

"I am going on deck," curtly.

"I will follow you there," politely.

"I did not mean that," with an angry push past him; and the bow and whispered assurance that he had not ventured to put so flattering a construction on her speech are alike unseen and unheard, for she is gone like the wind, without even a glance behind.

Captain Carew still watching them both furtively, makes an angry movement, as though to go after her; but when he sees Mr. Blythe take his place again, and order another bottle of wine, he knows there is no necessity for his presence, and sinks back again into his chair, careful not to make her exit more noticed than it already is.

When he strolls up on deck a quarter-of-an-hour later, he finds her leaning against the side of the vessel, and looking up into the sky, which to-night is lighted by such myriads of stars, and so bright a moon, that the expression of her face is as clearly seen as though it were noonday. The eyes a little and, as though her thoughts now were with the past; her lips a little stern, with some present vexation that she cannot at once cast off; and yet a depth of natural brightness over all which it seems no sorrow could effectually dim.

Captain Carew thinks it the prettiest face he has ever seen, and feels horribly inclined to tell her so.

"It is a lovely night!" he begins, substituting a very common-place remark for the one which, though as obvious, would have been certainly more disconcerting.

She starts, and turns round.

"Is it you? I am glad—"

She had meant to express her pleasure that it is not her tormentor of the dinner-table who has joined her; but, suddenly thinking better of it, leaves the sentence in its flattering incompleteness. He is, and looks, more pleased than yesterday he would have believed any woman's words could have made him.

"Yes, it is I! If you will let me sit here I promise not to disturb your reverie!"

"My reverie is best disturbed; it was not a pleasant one!"

"Not! Looking at you I can scarcely credit that," with a smiling, disbelieving glance, as he seats himself beside her.

Berry pouts discontently.

"I know what you mean. You think I am too young to have a trouble or a care; you think—"

"I think both troubles and cares are chiefly fanciful as yet," still smiling.

She touches her black dress expressively.

"I am an orphan!" she says, simply.

"I beg your pardon; I ought to have thought of that, seeing your black frock. And the loss is fresh to you still, and very bitter of course!" he says, with quick remorse.

Berry, having a suspicion even of false sentiment, and knowing that it was more horror than sorrow she felt at her father's death interposes hastily.

"My mother died too long ago for me to know what I have lost. And—and I do not like speak of the rest."

He changes the subject at once, but to Berry the new topic he chooses is scarcely more welcome.

"Mr. Blythe—have you known him before?" he questions, curiously.

"No—oh, no! Why do you ask?"

"I am afraid you would call it presumption on my part if I answered you."

"You can try! I will not promise forgiveness, but a fault confessed is half expiated, you

know!" with a bright, upward glance, which makes the man think that grey eyes are sweeter and more expressive than any others which Providence has given women to beguile his sex.

"It is only that I would like to put you on your guard against him. He is not exactly the sort of man I would introduce to my sisters—if I had any."

"Why!" with feminine curiosity, and feeling something of that interest even pure women do feel for the black sheep that are marked dangerous.

"Forgive me; I would rather not say. I do not like speaking against a man who, if not a friend exactly, is an acquaintance of some years' standing."

"You think a veiled innuendo is safer, perhaps?" says Berry, sharply, perversely inclined to take the part of the accused.

"It was for your sake I spoke!" reproachfully.

"I know; and I am very ungrateful. Please forget what I said!" holding out her hand frankly.

He takes it, and is slow to let it go. The little warm fingers lie so trustingly in his, without a flutter or a thought of anything unusual in the action.

"There was no need to warn me. I hate him!" she says, confidentially.

Her hand is relinquished so suddenly that she starts, and turns to see why no comment has been made on the remark which instinctively she knows must have given pleasure.

It is Mr. Blythe who, with the evident intention of interrupting their *tête à tête*, comes leisurely towards them, and stays the expression of satisfaction which has been on Captain Carew's lips.

Berry jumps to her feet.

"Don't let me think that I am disturbing you," says the new-comer, languidly, "or I will go away!"

"Go!" is on the tip of Berry's tongue, but she substitutes for it the conventional phrase, "Not at all," and shoots such a fierce glance at his dark, smiling face, that a man less bold and determined might have accepted its obvious meaning and retired. But not so has the Hon. Spencer Blythe obtained and kept his character for unscrupulousness and irresolubility.

"Then, if I am really not in the way, I will stop and finish my cigar. You don't object to tobacco out of doors?" questioningly, and with a calmness ensured by the knowledge that what he is smoking is the most delicate and fragrant weed that money can procure.

"Not at all!" says Berry, again; and then, turning to Captain Carew, "I am going below. Good-night!"

A dark scowl comes over Mr. Blythe's face at what he inwardly anathematizes as "the impudence of the child." He is so little accustomed to rebuff that it requires all his self-command to answer, smiling still—

"Ah! then you are deceiving me, after all! You do object to smoking, and would not confess. If you have so little confidence in me, I shall feel justified in giving you a reason for your distrust. You cannot expect me to keep true to our agreement if you have no faith."

He has thrown away his cigar and now looks laughingly in her eyes, with a veiled menace in his glance, however, that is meant to warn. But Berry ignores him completely, and nodding another good-night to Captain Carew, walks quickly away.

A bow has fallen from her dress, a little scrap of black ribbon; but, insignificant as it is the eyes of both men fall upon it, with something of the same triumphant gleam; but Captain Carew is the quicker, and before Berry has reached the top of the companion-ladder is at her side, holding it in his hand.

"It is your bow—you dropped it!" he says, giving it to her half-regretfully.

She takes it with such smiling thanks that he is emboldened to say more.

"Do not tempt me again!" he whispers, softly. "A flower first, then a bow; you must think I am St. Kevin himself. I warn you, the third time I shall not be so honest."

The little crimson glowing face is turned away

in such pretty confusion, that with one lingering pressure of the hand, in pity he releases her and lets it go; but he stands some minutes gazing after her, unconscious of the smiling glances that are following his movements, or the dark, angry, yet half-contemptuous looks of the man whom for the present he seems to be successfully rivaling.

There is such a strange, new feeling in his heart that there is no room for any other sensation, not even hope, nor the fear that later on is inseparable from love.

CHAPTER XVI.

BERRY'S lovers afford some amusement to the idlers on board who have no pressing affairs of their own to engage their attention. Before they reach Malta, speculation is already rife as to which is the favoured one, and bets are freely circulated among the more sporting part of the community, upon the likelihood of an engagement being announced before they arrive at Bombay.

Mr. Blythe has changed his tactics, and is more successful in his advances now. He is so penitent and reverential, that Berry feels remorseful for her former rudeness, and strives to make amends by a quiet gentleness so foreign to her nature, that, had he known her better he might have taken alarm.

As it is, he only plumes himself upon his tact and infallible knowledge of the female character.

"If storming the citadel does not answer, one can always starve them into raising the siege. It is a mere question of time," he thinks to himself, complacently blowing off a cloud of smoke from his cigar and watching it dreamily, as it rises in circles, and then evaporates.

Captain Carew, who is standing not far off, looks at him with grave disapproval. He, too, has been a little deceived by Berry's altered manner, and the thought sometimes crosses his mind, that the hate of which she spoke must have soon been overcome, or else that it has never existed.

With him she is so bright and saucy that he cannot think it is a mask to hide her deeper thoughts, or that she avoids anything more serious because she is afraid of him—and of herself.

He has had so little intercourse with women that no wonder he is doubtful, and jealous of this man who looks so self-confident and secure in his own attractions. Fortune seems to be favouring the other, too, for Captain and Mrs. Sowerby both encourage his attentions, either for his supposed merits, or on account of that handle to his name which he has almost invariably found of service in the prosecution of his plans.

The ship is steaming slowly into port. Already a crowd of small boats surround it and try to land with their wares, the inevitable sponges, jacks and corals, all the worst and dearest of their kind.

Presently Berry comes up, and, regardless of her two admirers, walks slowly across the deck and leans over the side. Simultaneously they stroll over and join her and simultaneously glance angrily at each other for so doing, but it is too late to retreat.

"Are you going on shore?" asks Captain Carew, rather aimlessly, seeing that landing at Malta is the one oasis in the voyage which reconciles the passengers to their fate.

"I believe I am to have the pleasure of escorting Mrs. Sowerby and Miss Scardale myself, so am in a position to answer your question in the affirmative," observes Mr. Blythe, with an under-tone of triumph in his languid voice.

Berry turns round with something of her old sharpness.

"I wish you would call me by my right name, Mr. Blythe!"

"I did not dare," he answers, with gentle impudence. "And yet it is such a sweet name—Berry!"

She is too indignant to explain, knowing that whatever she says he will turn to his own advantage. Bright and clever as she is, she is no match for this man, whose assurance carries him through much that mere talent for repartee could not accomplish. She turns her back to him and addresses Captain Carew.

"Come with us," she says, affably. "Captain Sowerby has some business, so will not be with us all the time, and three can never well walk together."

He accepts eagerly, and then as he murmurs his thanks a sudden misgiving comes upon him whether perhaps she does not mean him as an escort to Mrs. Sowerby to secure an uninterrupted *à-tête* with his rival. But he dismisses the idea as unworthy.

"How slowly we move; I don't believe we shall be really in before luncheon," continues Berry, impatiently.

"You will be able to land in half-an-hour, if you wish!" he contradicts, smiling.

"I don't believe it!"

"Then back your opinion. Will you bet me a discretion?"

"I don't know what a discretion is!" very doubtfully.

"It is an article to be chosen at the discretion of the loser!"

"Rather a risk of course, and we should each have to trust a little to the generosity of the other!"

"Don't trust to anyone," puts in Mr. Blythe, lazily. "It never pays!"

"I am not a Jew, Mr. Blythe; and don't expect cent. per cent."

"Then it is a bet!" asks Captain Carew, softly.

"Yes; it is a bet!"

She looks up at both men defiantly, as though challenging their possible disapprobation.

With all her faults and thoughtlessness Berry is not one whit fast, and has been driven into this, her first bet, by a perverse inclination to go against Mr. Blythe's advice. Besides, she is conscious that with Captain Carew she can safely venture more than with any other man would be expedient.

A woman's instinct is fortunately keen, and stands her in good stead where knowledge and experience fail.

Just then Captain Sowerby attracts her attention, and she goes over to his side. Mrs. Sowerby is there talking, and laughing at the persistence of the men in boats, who are trying to sell their wares even before they are allowed to go on deck.

Berry soon forgets all about her admirers in the interest this novel scene affords. The dark faces of the Maltese contrasted with their gaudy clothes; and the bright, golden oranges, which are their principal articles of sale, look very gay against the dark water; and the soldiers who have had no communication with the outer world these last few days, relieve themselves now by a shout of badinage to and fro that, if not always refined, at least adds to the motley merriment. The ship is still moving on slowly, with its noisy satellites, when the luncheon bell rings, and Berry remembering, hastily pulls out her watch.

"You have won!" says Mr. Blythe, at her side. "I wish you would bet something with me!"

"No, thank you. My first experience is sufficient. I might not be so fortunate another time!" she answers, curtly.

But when she meets Captain Carew at the entrance of the saloon door she looks less composed, and very unwilling to abide by the consequences of her bet.

"Luncheon was a quarter-of-an-hour earlier to-day, so we have neither of us won!" she says, quickly.

"What a shameful evasion of your responsibilities," he answers, smiling. "They will never admit you into Tattersall's if you play fast-and-loose with your engagements like that!"

"I have no ambition that way. I—I don't approve of ladies betting!" with uneasy severity.

"Then I will not try to lead you in to it again."

"And it is all right!" with a sigh of relief, for somehow she does not like accepting anything at his hands, more especially when it is gained thus.

"I don't know what you call all right! I cannot abandon my privileges this time, whatever I have promised for the future. You see a discretion is a peculiar sort of bet; the winner has nothing to say to it; everything is in the loser's hands, and I have a very strict code of honour about these things," gravely.

"I think you are very unfair."

"Don't say that, please."

"Unkind, then. Why should you force me into a false position like this?" half-angrily.

"Because it is such a pleasure to give you anything; because it is my dearest wish to give you all that I have in the world."

But Berry has gone before he can say more. In the one startled glance she had time to give she had read something of the truth in his earnest eyes, and with the wild timidity of a startled fawn flies before he can tell the rest.

He follows her through the swinging doors, hoping the best from her confusion and nothing loth at the delay. A public passage is scarcely the place for a declaration, and, besides, he is perhaps not unwilling to keep his liberty a little longer. That final forfeiting of all, from which there is no going back, is always a wrench to the masculine mind. What is lost by it is well understood; what gained a problem only the future can solve.

Captain Carew, who has never been subject to female influence before, shrinks a little from this leap into the unknown, and feels it almost a reprieve.

Perhaps it is as well that women with their quick impulses, and their reckless willingness to risk everything at the call of love, cannot always know the thoughts in their lover's minds. They would have small patience with the *pros* and *cons* that are calmly argued out; and would not believe in a love that, in their idea, such caution must chill if not destroy.

Meanwhile Berry eats her luncheon as in a dream, and when at last it is over, and the boats are waiting to take them on shore, she keeps close by Mrs. Sowerby, and effectually prevents the approach of anyone else by adopting a confidential tone that the subjects on which she is conversing do not exactly justify. Mrs. Sowerby looks at her in some bewilderment. She has never fathomed the character of the girl who, for the time being, is under her charge, nor is she ever likely to do so. She can only hope that it will all end for the best, and that she may be able some day to lay claim to having had the honour of chaperoning the future Lady Blythewood during the time the courtship was progressing. Who knows, too, that Berry may feel gratitude for her assistance, and repay her by an invitation to stay at Castle Blythewood!

As these Chateaux d'Espagne are built in her brain, the woman's pale cheeks flush, and her dim eyes brighten—forgetting for the time the cruel shifts of poverty and her burden of little children, all unprovided for, in the brilliant prospect of the glories that may await her in the success of another. So deep is she in thought that for some time she does not notice Berry has dropped behind with Captain Carew, and that the mainstay of her castle-building is walking rather ruefully at her side.

She gives a start, and comes at once to earth, seeing her hopes in danger of being wrecked.

To walk four abreast in those narrow streets is impossible, and she has no reasonable excuse for breaking up the *à-tête*. She can only keep addressing Berry every other minute, and thus prevent the distance widening between them. And the girl second her efforts, feeling a new shyness, and only too glad to escape from it by a general conversation. The afternoon passes quickly in shopping and looking over the palace and the wonderful old church, St. John's; finishing up by eating ices and drinking chocolate at a funny little shop with which both men have an old acquaintance from having several times

landed, going to-and-fro between England and India. They at last returned on board ship to dress for dinner and the opera. In these arrangements, Mrs. Sowerby full of a new fear only half allayed by Berry's persistent impartiality during the afternoon, does not include Captain Carew. He manages, however, to catch Berry for a moment in the saloon, ready to start; her little white cloak and hood, with swansdown border, drawn closely round her, and fluttering a big black fan.

It is the first time he has seen her in anything but rigid black, and she looks so sweet and baby-like that he feels inclined to take up that morning's subject where he left it off. But his half-formed design is speedily frustrated, for in her fright at what she thinks is near, she adopts a cold, preoccupied air that anyone as sensitive as Captain Carew could not mistake or ignore.

"Are you waiting for Mrs. Sowerby?" he begins, hesitatingly.

"Yes, it is very late! We ought to be starting now!"

"I shall see you at the opera!"

"I suppose so, unless the house is very large."

"It would be a very, very large house indeed, in which I could not find you. Don't fancy you could hide yourself from me so easily!"

"I have no wish to play bo-peep, Captain Carew," she says, indifferently.

"Let me put my mark upon you, and then there will be no fear of your being lost to me for long," he answers, audaciously, and with a sudden quick movement, for which she is not prepared, clasps something round her neck.

For a wonder the saloon is empty, and no one is there to see her but a steward at the other end, who is too busy and too uninterested to notice what is going on; but just as she puts up her hands with an indignant movement to displace whatever is there, the door of the ladies' cabin is opened, and Mrs. Sowerby sails in.

"Now, Berry, are you ready?" she asks, crossly, as she looks around for Mr. Blythe in vain.

"Quite; I have been waiting."

The girl is fumbling still at her neck; but Captain Carew bows down under pretence of moving a chair from her way, and manages to whisper,—

"Leave it there, it was an agreement, and you have no right to break your word."

Her face flushes rebelliously, but her hand falls obediently to her side.

Mr. Blythe joins them, with Captain Sowerby, and together they go down to the boat. It is a fine night, only inasmuch as there is no rain. There is a cold wind blowing, and no moon nor stars.

In the darkness Berry furtively puts up her hand to her throat to guess what it is has been fastened on to like a manacle, a symbol of the slavery to which a woman must always submit when she loves a strong-willed man.

They dine in the coffee-room of an hotel, and at first Berry is so busy scanning the numerous strange faces (for several men-of-war are lying in the harbour) that she forgets what has happened. Then Mrs. Sowerby recalls it to her mind.

"Are you going to adopt the Eastern idea that colours may be worn in mourning?" she asks, with a slight accent of reproach.

"I—I don't understand," is the stammered reply.

"The beads you are wearing, they are very pretty, you know, but a little incongruous with crape, don't you think?"

"I will take them off," eagerly.

"No, don't do that now. It would be a pity, they suit you so well. Red is quite your colour!"

"Red!" echoes Berry, aghast.

"Yes, quite red. Pink coral is more fashionable I suppose, but I always preferred the other. No! don't take it off, silly child! It looks so well with black, does it not, Mr. Blythe?"

"It is charming," is the prompt reply.

"Mrs. Berry is always charming," declares Captain Sowerby, warmed into momentary enthusiasm by the bright, blushing face by his side.

And Berry desists from her useless efforts. The clasp is stiff, and she does not know how it goes; besides, she feels unwilling to disobey the giver's wish.

The worst is over now; no one else is likely to notice what she is wearing, or at least draw attention to it in her presence.

She resigns herself to her fate, with a little relieved sigh; the beads, to her excited fancy, seeming to caress and clasp her neck like the hand of a friend, or lover.

The opera-house is full that night, but even in the first rapid glance round, Berry sees where Captain Carew is sitting, and is glad that his gaze meets hers at once, as though he had been anxiously waiting for her coming. In her sudden joy she smiles and touches her neck with her tiny fingers.

It is the first direct encouragement she has given him, and his heart beats so high in response to it that he can scarcely restrain himself from joining her at once; and yet he knows that he could not be so near without betraying what is in his thoughts. The evening seems interminable.

When the last song is over, and the final chorus thundered out, he goes quickly to the door to see her, and to speak to her, if only one word. But by some mischance he misses her.

He hurries quickly through the noisy street, thickly peopled still with the persevering Maltese who are loth to sleep while there is a chance of making one more sou out of their visitors. Steadily refusing all offers of guidance from the clamorous throng, he soon reaches the quay, and by lucky chance the boat Captain Sowerby has engaged is only just leaving the shore.

He steps in and takes his place—scarcely seen in the darkness—and quite content to sit silent listening to Berry's clear young voice, as she discusses the night's amusement and regrets its termination.

When they get alongside the transport he pushes forward to assist her up the ladder; but someone is before him, and in the light of a lantern, which is flashed down from the ship's side, he can clearly distinguish the face and figure of Spencer Blythe.

One hand holds hers as she steps cautiously on to the lowest rung of the narrow ladder, the other he lays audaciously on the snowy swansdown that borders her cashmere cloak. He stoops, too, and whispers something in her ear.

It is only one word; but on the hearer's heart it falls like a weight of lead, accompanied as it is by a caressing gesture.

"Pussy!"

And there is no word of rebuke.

The girl springs up the ladder with the speed and grace of an antelope, but Captain Carew cannot see her face, and there is nothing to tell him that the familiarity has been distasteful to her, or in any way resented.

(To be continued.)

THE rubber trade is now keenly interested in a new product which is put upon the market under the name of "porchoid." It is a combination of oil and litharge, which has been heated to an extremely high temperature, then cooled with very protracted and thorough agitation. Shreds of fibre are placed in the compound and exposed to the air. They thus become wholly oxidized and are then put through heavy rollers. The preparation has somewhat the colour and appearance of amber. It is susceptible of very fine subdivision and can be rolled to an almost transparent sheet. It is water-proof and very durable; the cost of it is the merest trifle as compared with that of rubber. One of its futures is thought to be in the making of pneumatic tyres, its great durability, strength and elasticity being favourable for such a purpose. Another use is said to be in electrical appliances. It is perfect as an insulator, and as it never breaks or cracks and always adheres closely to the wire, its great value for such employment is apparent.

A VAIN LOVE.

—101—

(Continued from page 296.)

"How can I tell?" in a sudden access of passion and despair. "I loved him, and I have lost him; but I am not the only sorrowful one in the house! Oh! if you could see my father, my poor, miserable, remorseful father, even you would pity him!"

"Heaven forbid that I should do otherwise! I consider his punishment infinitely greater than his sin. The man who was so merciless to him ought to have a heavy heart. But, child, surely you will not allow Herbert his freedom merely to lose it again to Miss Collison!"

"What else can I do? Can I win back his love? No, no; dead love does not revive again! Can I bear to see him wretched? Oh, no! Rather let me suffer all my life than any years of his should be made bitter!"

"You are an angel, Hero! I hoped one day to call you daughter. I should have gladly resigned my position in the Hall to you; but I will never countenance Hetty Collison's presence, and so I told Herbert."

As she speaks Hetty enters the room, and, seeing who the visitor is, assumes a deprecatory, shy air, which, however, fails to impose on the astute, warm-hearted old lady.

"So you are the girl my son has chosen in Miss Vyvash's place?"

"He has done me the honour to offer me his name, madam," softly; "but he had first obtained his release from Hero."

"Humph! Come here, and let me look at you," and as Hetty obeys, she peers up into the bold, handsome face with anything but favour.

"Your beauty has bewitched him," she says at last. "Men are proverbially fools where a lovely woman is concerned. But you will soon disillusion him; you will make his life a burden and a misery to him. You are false and cruel, bold and unprincipled, and when you come to the Hall I shall leave it."

"I am very glad you have arrived at such a sensible decision," Hetty retorts, insolently, "as I shall not be under the painful necessity of requesting you to leave," and with a short laugh she turns away. But at the window she pauses.

"Knowing your pride, madam, I believed you would prefer Herbert's wife to have no stain upon her name. Few people care to consort with convicts or their daughters," and with a contemptuous glance at the two women, she steps out upon the lawn, and goes to meet her lover.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN Charles Ingram hears of Hetty's engagement, he threatens vengeance, terrible and speedy, upon Herbert Norman; but as Hetty only laughs at him, and Hero is openly contemptuous, he contents himself with making violent plunges at the walls and doors with a carving knife, by way of illustrating how he will serve his rival.

It is, however, a curious and noteworthy fact that when Herbert enters the house Ingram leaves it with more speed than is consistent with dignity.

The slow and dreadful days drag on, and life is intolerable alike to Vyvash and his daughter.

"Hero," he says, one morning, "this state of things is killing me. Child! child! can you suggest no way of escape? I shall go mad with the shame and misery of it all."

She leans her head upon her hands, and appears lost in thought; but suddenly her face flushes with new hope. She lifts herself erect, and whispers hurriedly,—

"Yes, dear, I have found a way. We will run away from our own home. We will find some new place in which to hide, and we will be happy—oh, so happy together!"

He does not share her hopefulness.

"We shall find escape impossible; Ingram is so watchful."

"Give me time to mature my plans," she answers, cheerfully, "and don't include such a word as impossible in your vocabulary."

Two or three days pass by, and he fancies Hero has forgotten her project, when she calls him into her room.

"Dear," she says, "get together a few necessary things. We shall leave here to-night. Hush! don't exclaim, but lock the door, and see my disguise."

She rapidly dresses herself in a full plain skirt, fashioned after the style of an elderly farmer's wife, an old-fashioned shawl, a great bonnet and heavy veil. Her beautiful hair is brushed back from her brow, and hidden in a coil under the unbecoming bonnet.

"Shall I do?" she questions, with a faint smile. "If you met me in the street, would you know me, dear? Ah! your eyes say no. Well, now, listen. To-night, when Ingram is safe in his room, you must shave off all this venerable beard, and alter your appearance to the best of your ability. Then I will steal down to you. Leave the study window open, because through that we must effect our escape. We shall walk to the station. I will take third-class tickets for London. Once there we shall be safe; and Mrs. Norman, who is in the plot, will write us from time to time, so that we shall not be ignorant of the enemy's movements. Leave a note for Ingram to the effect that he shall be paid a certain sum quarterly on application to your solicitor, as long as he keeps silence."

She gives him all the details of her plan clearly and concisely; takes upon herself the leadership in all things; is so quiet, so brave, so intelligent, that Mr. Vyvash regards her with unmitigated wonder.

When dinner is announced she takes her place quietly, and with a smile upon her lips. Voluntarily she addresses Ingram, and plies him with wine, although it must be confessed he does not need any persuasion to fill his glass again and again.

In wonder at the change in her, he says, coarsely,—

"I say, what's up! You're denced amiable all at once!"

And she answers, with no change of expression,—

"Matters have been so uncomfortable of late that I have made up mind to make the best of a bad bargain. If we are to remain in the same house it will be pleasanter to exercise some civility to each other."

"Ah! you find I'm a man of my word, and it's the best policy to be friendly with me. Why, bless you, I could floor you as easily as I can break this!" and he dashes his glass to the ground.

She will not show her disgust.

"Doubtless! I should not like to make trial of your strength," and she smiles brightly up at him.

He has now drunk sufficient wine to render him noisy; a little more, and he grows amorous, and presently he will be quarrelsome. In her heart Hero is woefully afraid, and she has such need of courage to-night. Presently she rises.

"You will join us soon in the drawing-room?" she says. "Hetty will have pleasure in singing to you."

"Oh, I say; don't go yet!" he cries, trying to catch her skirts; but she eludes him cleverly.

"Remember, we shall wait for you," she says, and so slips from the room.

Three hours later a little dark figure steals along the corridors, pauses a moment at Hetty's room, from whence comes the sound of regular breathing; then, swiftly and noiselessly, goes downstairs. The dining-room door is thrown open, and on a couch lies Charles Ingram, deep in drunken slumber.

With a sign of thankfulness, Hero proceeds to the study. Her father is asleep in his chair, but dressed for the journey.

"Father!" she whispers, "wake! There is no time to lose! Hush! no noise, dear, or he will be roused. Are you quite ready?"

Together they step through the open window, and turn to take a long, farewell glance at the dear familiar home which has sheltered them for so many years; then they bend their steps resolutely towards the station.

Hero takes their tickets, and hurries Mr. Vyvash (well disguised by his muffler) into an empty compartment. Then the signal is given for starting, the train moves out of the station, and, with a thankful sigh, Hero sinks back.

"Free!" she says, "free at last, my dear!" "But not safe," Mr. Vyvash answers, dreadingly. "I seem to have lost all capacity for hope," and he grasps her gentle hand as if to gain courage from mere contact with her.

She smiles bravely up at him, although her heart is aching, and she is so wearied that she longs intensely for rest. But her father does not guess this; he even finds himself feeling reproachfully towards her because she is so cheerful, and seems so easily to have forgotten Herbert.

It is a foggy morning in December, and Mr. Vyvash is sitting with his daughter at breakfast in the first-floor parlour of a Lambeth lodging-house. Hero had decided that in a populous, and not too aristocratic locality, they would be safer than at Kensington; and although he grumbled a little, Mr. Vyvash offered no opposition to her will.

In answer to a knock at the door, Hero says, "Come in," and a neat, rather pretty girl enters.

"A letter for you, Miss Vyvash!" she says, in a tone of curiosity; for the first-floor lodgers rarely received so much as a post-card.

Hero flashes slightly as she glances at the handwriting; and, being alone with her father, again says—

"It is from Mrs. Norman. Shall I read it to you now, dear?"

"Yes; I find no news in the paper this morning," and his voice is querulous. "Our present mode of life is most melancholy."

"It will be better when spring comes, dear," she answers gently, and, opening her letter, begins to read:—

"MY DEAR HERO,—I have great news for you, but I shall save the best until last. First (and oh! my child, how can I bear to hurt you, as I know I shall!) that poor silly boy of mine has crowned his folly by marrying Hetty Collison. The ceremony took place yesterday, and was by special license—no bridesmaids, no pretty frippery, although Miss Collison begged hard for some display. They left for Nice at once, and intend to be absent a month. When they return I shall be gone, as the same house cannot shelter that woman and myself. I don't know where I shall pitch my tent, but, if you will have me, I shall be glad to spend a few weeks with you whilst my plans are maturing.

"Now for the news I call good; it is, perhaps, wicked to rejoice even in the death of one's enemies, and yet I do rejoice, for your sake, that Charles Ingram is dead."

The letter drops from Hero's hand, and with a sudden, passionate gesture she flings her arms about her father, sobbing out,—

"Oh, my darling! my darling! You are safe! Kiss me. Let me be the first to congratulate you. Father! father! how happy we will be!"

At first he does not seem to understand; sorrow and fear have so benumbed his faculties; but at last the truth is borne fully in upon him, and bowing his face on the pretty brown head, he sobs like a little child.

When they have grown calmer, Hero takes up the letter once again, and resumes the thread of Mrs. Norman's story:—

"I will tell you all about it. Of course, after your fight Ingram was like one gone mad, and frightened the servants out of their senses; but when he had grown quieter and had had time for thought, he gave out that Mr. and Miss Vyvash had been called away suddenly, leaving everything in his care, as a proof of their trust in and affection for him. Then he gave himself up wholly to drinking; he was never sober, and

It was useless for Linsell to lock up the cellar, for then he procured wines from the 'Green Man.'

"Well, on Thursday, he invited some men from the village to dine with him, and I suppose the orgies were fearful. When they were all gone he lay down upon a couch and went to sleep. No one disturbed him, and when Linsell went down in the morning he found him still in the same position, and the room unnaturally still. He called to him and tried by every conceivable means to rouse him, but failed; and getting frightened he started one of the maids for the doctor.

"Well, to make a disagreeable story short, the inquest was held this morning, and the verdict was, 'Death through excessive drinking.' So now, my dear child, you can return to us once more; that is, if the place is not hateful to you. Believe me, you are sorely missed, and none will be so glad to welcome you back as the woman who once hoped to call you 'daughter.'

"If you determine to remain where you are write me at once."

Little remains for me to say. Hero and her father returned home three days after the receipt of Mrs. Norman's letter, and she old lady met them on the threshold with words of loving welcome.

In a short time they were settled quietly in the familiar house. Then Hero's life of self-abnegation begins. It is soon patent to her that her father's mental faculties are becoming obscured; he grows daily more helpless, more childish, cannot bear to lose her from his side if but for an hour. And so in love and patience she watches over him for three long years; then she is alone once more, for Edwin Vyvash is gathered to his rest.

Hetty queens it at the Hall, but Mrs. Norman lives with Hero at the white house with the verandah. And Herbert! Well, he has lived to regret his folly; to turn with loathing from the violent, unprincipled, heartless woman it is his misery to call wife.

Alas! for Hero. No second love can visit her heart, or make her life beautiful; but steadily she turns from thoughts of the past, for all old associations are cruel, all old memories instinct with agony, and—

"Bitter to the heart
The very ways where now they walk apart."

[THE END]

THE latest Parisian scientific toy is a picture-book in which the animals make their characteristic sounds. It is known as the "*livre d'images parlantes*"—a book of speaking pictures. Below is a description of the toy that is contributed to *La Nature* by M. Leroy—"The pictures represent the most familiar domestic animals, and each animal speaks its own language. To cause it to break silence it suffices to pull a string at the edge of the book. Here are a rooster, a cow, a lamb, little birds in their nest, a donkey, a cuckoo, a goat. On the last page are children who are welcoming their parents. If we pull at each page the string spoken of above we shall hear the characteristic cry of each creature. The rooster crows, and his cry is very well imitated. The donkey hee-haws, the lamb bleats, the little birds twitter, the cow moos, the cuckoo sings and the little children call out 'papa' and 'mamma.' These various results are obtained very simply with the aid of small bellows placed in a box hidden in the book. When the string is pulled, the air enters the corresponding bellows, and is then expelled by a spring that tends to return the bellows to its original position. The air makes its exit through a special tube appropriate for each cry, and at the same time the bellows meets with certain obstacles placed on a wire. These arrangements have been studied with a view to producing the proper effects."

"THE HUMAN HAIR: Its Restoration and Preservation." A Practical Treatise on Baldness, Greyness, Superfluous Hair, &c. 25 pages. Post-free six stamps, from Dr. Hoax, Hair Specialist,ournemouth

WHAT LIES BEYOND?

—101—

CHAPTER XIII.

THAT night in Sea View was one of anxious watching. The swoon of its young mistress was so long, so deep, that a desperate fear grew into the hearts of those about her, lest the long lashes might never again upraise themselves from the marble cheeks; and when, finally, with a gasping sigh, the brown eyes opened, there was in them no look of recognition. Mona could understand, as none other, the fearful shock which had produced so unhappy a result. She could well imagine how that blood-curdling laugh and chilling air, which wrapped one about as with a winding-sheet, might well paralyse heart and brain—aye, life itself.

Every few minutes, a scream such as had brought them to her side would burst from Claire's scarlet lips, parched and burning with fever, and wild, incoherent words escaped them. Towards morning she grew calmer, though her delirium still remained. Then Mona persuaded them to leave her, while she watched alone.

"Mona, Mona!" whispered the sick girl.

Delighted, Mona bent over her.

"Yes, dear. You know me!"

But then she saw that Claire had uttered the name only in wandering.

"Mona," repeated Claire. "Yes, you are more beautiful than I, and it is you he loves. It is only to see you that he comes. I have known him such a little while to love him, and yet—oh, to give him up to her, how can I do it!" Then she would shrink and press her hands to her ears as though to shut out some horrid sounds. "Go away, go away!" she cried, piteously. "Oh, why have you come to me!"

She grew quieter at times, and for long would lie back upon her pillow, with a dreamy smile on her beautiful face.

"Bernard!" she murmured once—"Bernard! Ah! my love, my love!"

And, as though the words in themselves brought healing, with Mona's hands clasped in hers, she fell asleep.

For hours the faithful watcher sat motionless, fearing to move lest the sleeper might be disturbed. She knew the secret now, and with the knowledge came the memory of some words she once had spoken.

"I feel to-night as though I were destined to work her, too, some harm. Ah, not so!"

She saw now which way the danger lay, and might avoid it. But how strange that Claire should love this man—this young artist, known so short a time. He was poor, too—so poor that he had begged to paint Mona's portrait, and he must have been poor to want that, Mona thought in her utter unconsciousness of any vanity.

Occasionally, during her silent watch, the door would softly open, but the gentle shake of her head kept any from entering. It was past noon when Claire woke, but this time to consciousness and recognition.

"What has happened!" she said, feebly, seeing Mona sitting dressed and pale with exhaustion from the long watch, by her side. "Ah, I remember now," she added, shudderingly.

"Mona, Mona! I thought it was all your imagination, but I know now. Oh, will I ever be able to forget the knowledge?"

"Don't talk, Claire," her patient nurse pleaded.

"I loved Sea View so dearly, Claire went on.

"I never believed the old superstition, but now—now—" and she shivered, self in an agony.

"Now you will make yourself ill again if you persist in thinking about it," interrupted Mona, soothingly.

"Ill! Have I been ill?"

"Yes, Claire, very ill."

"True. It all happened last night, in the darkness; and now the sun has risen high. Have I been delirious, Mona? What have I talked about?"

She asked the latter question as though fearful of an answer, and a look of relief swept over the lovely face as she replied, lightly,—

"How did you expect me to put together your

incoherent ramblings! Besides, you have been asleep for hours."

"And you have been awake watching me. You have not closed your eyes. How big and almost black they look, in contrast to your white, tired face. Come, darling, lie down here beside me and rest."

"I must first let your mother know that you are better—she has been so anxious about you."

Mona had not known she was so weak until she had taken some few steps along the hall, on her errand. Then, wearied with one posture, she staggered in her faintness, and must needs lean against the wall to gain a momentary support.

"You are ill!" said Alton Ayre's pitying voice, as he in that moment came up the stairs.

"No, no!" she replied, striving to stand upright and regain her strength. "Only I have been watching beside Claire. Her hand was in mine. I have been afraid to move, and the long strain in one position makes movement strange to me."

With the air of one used to obedience, Alton threw open the door of Claire's bedroom; then, ere Mona divined his intentions, she felt herself lifted in his arms, and laid upon the low, broad couch.

"Lie quiet," he commanded, with gentle sternness, and was gone, closing the door softly behind him.

In scarcely a minute he returned, in his hand a glass of wine.

"Drink this," he said, holding it to her lips. "Now sleep."

"But Claire—" she began.

"Claire will be—nay, is already cared for. For once you must think of yourself."

One minute Mona strove to conquer the force of his will, then she gave up the struggle, while with a half-sob, she fell into a dreamless sleep.

For full half an hour he stood looking down upon her with a look no man, and but few women, had ever seen on Alton Ayre's face before.

"And she is only a fisher-girl!" he murmured to himself, as he turned away. "Were she a princess born, it would be more natural. What is her future? How can I save her from it?"

Then he softly opened the door, to meet Kate Mayhew face to face.

Ere he could close it, Kate had seen the unconscious sleeper, and a pang of jealous rage shot into the steel-blue eyes which instantly the light lashes hid from view.

When she lifted them again, there was only in their shallow depths an expression of regret and contrition.

"I was on my way to find Miss Foster," she said, in low tones, as though forcing herself to an unpleasant task—first, to learn how dear Claire was, and, secondly, to acknowledge to Miss Foster the injustice she did her in her ignorance a week ago, and to beg her to pardon it."

The man, unsuspecting of guile, seeing only the expression of pain, and listening to the constrained tones of the voice, felt that he, too, might avow an almost equal injustice to the speaker, and also ask forgiveness.

"Miss Foster has just fallen asleep in here, Miss Kate," he answered. "She is exhausted, and I made her lie down; but, when she wakes I know that she will appreciate the kindness of your generous acknowledgement."

The blonde quivered with suppressed rage. Each word that he had uttered had been a dagger in her soul.

"I made her lie down! I know that she will appreciate it!" etc. How dared he answer for Mona! But she had a part to play. She must play it to the end, that there might be no suspicion attached to her when that end came—and it was close at hand now.

"He must learn the evening when action, not words, was the order of things," Bernard French had said, and she must share his knowledge.

She would spy upon his every action until she could mark out with certainty his plans; then all would be in readiness for the final blow.

But the hand that struck it they would search for and never find. Who would dream that it was hid beneath her velvet glove!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE library at Sea View was a deserted room even in the broad glare of day, and once more Sea View itself had regained its usual calm—only that Claire shuddered when she passed the closed door, and now and then the colour would desert her cheeks, as if in terror at some secret thought.

Nor had Kate Mayhew failed to make the *amende honorable*, to which Mona had listened in a sort of incredulous amazement, but, too loyal to suspect disloyalty, too truthful to suspect untruth, accepted with an instant softening of her garnered bitterness.

In the strange excitement of these events the days had flown, until another week had folded itself in the past, when, one morning, Bernard French presented himself among them.

It was an unusual time for a visit from him, and though a soft crimson flush crept into Claire's cheek as she welcomed him, Miss Mayhew's watchful glance saw his eyes steal past her and flash a momentary signal into another man's answering glance beyond.

"The time is at hand," she whispered to herself, as having left the room unobserved, she cautiously opened the library-door, closing it behind her, and creeping into the window-seat to watch and wait.

Nor was her waiting long. In ten minutes the door again opened and the two men entered.

"We are sure of privacy here," Alton Ayre began. "Now, Bernard, what is it?"

"Only this," he answered, "the hour for action has arrived. A vessel is now in harbour from which the smugglers, to-morrow night, will attempt to convey their goods. It would have been done a night or two ago, but the ship was detained. I have no right, Alton, to ask you to mix yourself in this matter, but I know no one else to trust, and I need a blue light lighted on the highest peak of rock. I have left it there buried under the stones on the left hand side, a little wooden cross over it marking the spot. If you will light it for me by ten o'clock to-night, my men will be watching the signal, and all will be well. Don't neglect it, old fellow, if you will undertake it at all, or my life will be the forfeit. I wouldn't ask you if there was any possible risk."

"I'll do it, Bernard. You may depend upon me; but you are sure the light is there?"

"Sure! Of course I am sure. When a man's life is the stake, my boy, he doesn't neglect precautions. But I've another favour to ask of you, Alton, I can't tell—it may be one of those fellows may be a little too quick for me, and if so—if I can't tell her myself—you will say to Mona for me that I was sorry to have to do this thing—that I would never have undertaken it if I had known, but that with my face turned to the fray I had to keep on. In that case, tell her I have provided for her in my will, and that she must accept it as my atonement. I don't think she loves this man who calls himself her father. I don't believe he is her father. If I live I'll find it out; if I die—"

He stopped, with a half-sad, half-weary smile, strange to see on the brave young face.

"You won't die," said Alton, cheerily; "but I wish, Bernard, that you had never set foot upon this coast."

A half-hour later Miss Mayhew sat in her own room, and before her open desk.

Lying upon it was a note that Alton Ayre once had written her, in paying her his forfeit of some trifling bet which had passed between them, and in which he had been the loser.

The blank sheet under her hand bore his monogram in dainty colouring upon the top, and slowly and with laborious care the writing she executed beneath was singularly like the bold untraced strokes she strove to copy. The words were these:—

"Beware of treachery! The artist whom you harbour is a spy. To-night he is to betray you."

"(Signed.) A FRIEND."

This, with a little malicious smile of triumph on her thin lips, she folded and addressed to "Rob Foster, Fisherman."

"The smuggler will triumph, but he will not dare remain here. He will go away and take his daughter with him. Claire's lover will be killed—for she loves him, though she thinks no one suspects her secret; but he loves this low born fisher-girl who turns men mad. You will be left for me to comfort, Alton Ayre. You will be better prepared for my sympathy, now that I have humbly confessed myself in the wrong to your beggar; and if I play my cards well, I shall win you yet—aye, win and wear you, my prince among men!"

Then, with as little hesitation as though bound on an errand of mercy, she rose, and, tying on her hat, fastened a thick brown veil across her face. Unperceived she left the house, and took her lonely way across the cliffs, to that highest point indicated by Bernard French to his friend.

Here she paused, but a mere momentary glance revealed to her the wooden cross. With her own hands she dragged away the stones, and soon discovered the precious light. Carefully she restored the rocks, though it required all her strength to fulfil the task, and laid upon them, as before, the wooden cross.

"He will believe, should his life be spared, that his friend betrayed him. He will be too proud to charge his friend with it, and my part never will be suspected."

Reasoning thus, she clambered down until the sea lashed the cliffs but a few feet below her. Here she raised her arm, and, with one swift movement, sent the light far out among the seething waves.

She watched it disappear, and her laugh of exultation rose shrill and clear above the deafening noise of the water. Then she retraced her steps.

Presently a fishing-lad came whistling by, his nets slung over his shoulder. He stopped abashed on seeing a lady in his path.

"My boy," she said, "do you know where Rob Foster lives? And is it far from here?"

"Not far, miss. A quarter of a mile at most."

"Will you carry this note for me to the house, and leave it, answering no questions if they ask you any! Or, stay! I tell them, if they insist upon the truth, that a servant from Sea View gave it to you!" slipping, as she spoke, a silver coin in his hand.

The lad looked up amazed, turning the coin over and over in his brown fingers.

"I'll do it," he said, starting to his feet.

"She don't look like a servant, and she don't pay like a servant!" he thought, to himself as he swiftly ran on. "But that's naught to me. That's between her and Rob."

"It's for the old man," he explained to Mrs. Foster, as he delivered the sealed note.

The woman paled.

"All right!" she responded.

But when the messenger had departed, she scanned it curiously.

"It's from one of his confederates, doubtless; and I've a mind not to give it to him, that I have. There's some new mischief brewing. I read it in his face this morning. I'll think it over at any rate; though it wouldn't be well for me to let him find it out."

"It's all safe, miss," said the lad, returning to the watching figure.

She said nothing, but turned away with a smile upon her lips.

CHAPTER XV.

THE sun sank behind a mass of clouds, as Mona watched from one of the windows of the great house, its reflected colours shining on the rarely beautiful face, and tinging the pale cheeks with a shade of crimson.

Lower and lower it sank, until all colouring had disappeared, and the grey of twilight took its place, gradually darkening into night; but still the girl stood motionless, a strange weight resting on her heart.

For almost the first time since he had bidden her farewell, she thought of Paul Miller to-night. The memory of the words she had overheard her father utter weighed on her soul. This was the night which he had set apart. For what? Why

should it trouble her? Was it fear lest some accident should befall him, which made her heart beat so loud and fast?

He had been out in his fishing-smack when the winds wailed and the storm-clouds burst above him, yet calmly and quietly she had waited his return, knowing that time would bring him. It was unnatural, but she knew that the love she bore her parents was not such as children generally felt. Towards her mother she felt a certain tenderness, for there had been hours when that mother had nursed her through illness, or wiped away her childish tears, too often inspired by a father's harshness. He had always been hard and harsh, sometimes brutal. She had often felt the force of his strong arm. His dominant feeling in his child seemed to be of pride—albeit he taunted her with her superiority and declared that she was growing ashamed of them that bore her.

The crowning act of his injustice had been his wish to force her into a marriage with Paul Millar.

Why did she remember this to-night, with his words, that the marriage she then scorned she would one day pray for? Was it premonition? Was it fate?

If Paul were but here to-night, she would seek him out, and bid him save her father from something which was impending, she knew not what, but which hammed her in like a dark cloud. It seemed to her excited fancy like a foretaste of disgrace as though she were on the threshold of the realisation of the prophecy which he had uttered, and which she had scorned.

She was so lonely to-night, so lonely, though in the drawing-room below a gay group was gathered, whose merry voices reached her even here.

She found herself listening for Alton Ayre's voice, and listening in vain. She could not distinguish it, though Miss Mayhew's treble could be distinctly heard.

"I must be very revengeful that I should still dislike her," she murmured to herself. "Or is it because—because of her love for him?"

She dared not utter the name even to herself. She had avoided him more persistently than before, since the day he had lifted her in his arms and commanded her to rest. Neither had he seemed to wish it otherwise. Once or twice she had discovered his gaze fixed upon her; but his eyes had invariably glanced elsewhere when they met hers.

"I had almost better have married Paul," she thought bitterly. "At least, he would have been good and kind to me. At least, he would not have despised me, as I am despised here; and I—what am I, that I should dare to despise him?"

Then the clock, striking nine, warned her that her absence would be marked, and turning wearily, she went down to the drawing-room.

The instant that she entered she noted that one among their number was missing, and she read in the momentary flash of Miss Mayhew's eyes, as she entered alone, that Kate had also noted Mr. Ayre's absence, and connected it with hers. Kate's glance now appeared to say: "Where is he? You have been together. Why do you come in alone?"

Neither was Bernard French there; and Claire, too, looked uneasy and expectant.

Obedying a sudden impulse, Mona crossed to Claire's side.

"I am going to the cottage, Claire, I will be back within an hour."

"Stay! I will go with you," Claire answered, eagerly. "I have been longing all the evening to get outside the house, but had not courage to undertake it."

"You had better not come dear," said Mona. "It is a dark night. I am only going because—"

"Because what?" questioned Miss Raymond, the first suspicion of her friend she had ever known darting into her mind. "Have you an appointment for another sitting for your picture?"

"Oh, Claire!" Mona reproachfully whispered, divining the momentary jealousy which had brought distrust, and feeling only a loving pity for its cause. "You know better than that. If

you are not afraid, come, then. Perhaps Mr. French will be at the hut, and can return with us."

Kate Mayhew watched them together leave the room.

"He was not with her," she muttered to herself. "Can he have gone so early to the cliff? And what will he do when he discovers the blue light missing? But where have they gone? Can this beggar suspect that aught's amiss? Doubtless she's one of the gang!" The thought brought inspiration. "If she's not, why not throw suspicion upon her? Who would believe her word against mine? Ha, ha, Alton Ayre. Let the disgrace of the father wrap itself about his daughter, and I think your proud old blood will at last assert itself in your veins. You'll hardly care for a girl who had been in a prison!"

The last word, and all its latent possibilities, almost overcame her with a fiendish triumph, as, in imagination, she saw the harvest such a seed must sow.

Springing up, she crossed the floor to an open window, and stood gazing out into the darkness; just as the hall-door opened, a stream of light for an instant fell athwart the lawn, and two figures ran lightly down the steps, and disappeared in the direction of the hut.

But few words were interchanged in that lonely walk, as neither Mona nor Claire sought to learn the other's thoughts, until a feeble glimmer from the cottage window shot like a reassuring ray into both their hearts. Both breathed freer.

In five more minutes, Mona quietly unfastened the outside latch of the door and entered the hut, Miss Raymond following.

Mrs. Foster was sitting before the dying embers of the fire by which the supper had been prepared.

She sprang to her feet with a start, as though fearful of every sound.

"It is only I, mother," said Mona, "and Miss Claire with me. Where are father and Mr. French?"

"I don't know, child—I don't know; but how you startled me! I am growing old and nervous, I believe, I beg pardon, Miss Raymond. Good-evening, miss."

"Good-evening," replied Claire, kindly; though her glance wandered disappointedly about the room.

"How long has father been out?" questioned Mona.

"An hour or more." Then Mrs. Foster caught Mona by the arm, and drew her to one side of the hut.

"I'm glad you've come, Mona, for I'm sorely troubled, lass. There's something brewing in the wind to-night," she whispered, so low that Claire could not catch the words. "I've kept the secret so long, but it's burning in my breast to-night, and I can't keep it any longer. A note was brought here to-day for your father, by a little lad. I can't read myself, and I feared to give it to him, lest it might lead him into new mischief; but since I've kept it, I thought as mayhap it might be a note of warning or such like."

"Give me the note, mother. Let me read it." "What will your father say?" whined Mrs. Foster, drawing it from her pocket. "He said that you must never know. He always kept it from you."

But Mona had snatched the note and tore it open. Word for word she read it aloud, forgetful that Claire was listening with white face and bated breath, drawing step by step nearer, with each word.

"I've sent him to his death," wailed the woman, rocking herself to-and-fro in her remorseful despair—"I've sent him to his death, when I might have saved him!"

"Not so, mother. I will follow and warn him. It may not yet be too late. But what has he done? What is he doing?"

"He is a smuggler," replied the wife, gloomily, as though she had gone too far in her confession to stop here.

"A smuggler!" Mona echoed, with white lips; and Bernard French was a spy upon him! Then her eyes again fell on the note, and recognised the monogram and writing,

"Merciful Heaven!" she exclaimed, starting back, "it is Alton Ayre who has betrayed his friend. Thank Heaven I do not belong to their world. There is no truth in it. But I must go. Courage, mother—courage!"

She turned, but in the doorway of the hut stood her friend, with blanched cheeks and flashing eyes.

"You would save your father, and Bernard French's noble life would pay the forfeit," said Claire, slowly, between her clenched teeth. "I say you shall not pass!"

(To be continued.)

THE BRIDE'S MISTAKE.

—23—

"Oh, Harry, how beautiful this is!" cried Sophie Garland, clasping her plump little hands with delight. "I never dreamed that you had prepared such a home as this for me!"

"Love in a cottage, eh?" said Harry Garland, looking down with eyes of amused admiration at his pretty young bride. "But, you see, Sophie, I thought this would be much nicer than London lodgings! For the summer months, at least!"

Cloverdale was the prettiest of Gothic cottages, all embowered in blooming lilacs, fragrant tresses of honeysuckle and climbing roses. There was a little lawn shorn close as green plush, a running brook bridged over with cedar-nailed planks, and the smallest of grottoes, where the drip of a cascade was lost among ferns and lilies.

"It's just charming!" said Mrs. Garland, who had filled both hands with tulips, daffodils, and early roses. "I never dreamed of anything so lovely! And there is a cabinet piano in the drawing-room, and real stained glass windows in the library, and the quaintest sundial I ever saw!"

"And plenty of spare rooms if my mother should wish to spend the summer with us," said Mr. Garland, carelessly.

Sophie's face fell, all of a sudden. The roses and daffodils drifted to the ground; she came close to Harry, and began nervously playing with the middle button of his coat.

"Harry," she said, "I don't want to seem ungracious, but—but perhaps it is best to have an understanding upon this question at once."

"On what question?" said Harry, somewhat bewildered.

"On the mother-in-law question," courageously answered Sophie.

Harry burst out laughing. "My dear child," said he, "who has been filling your innocent little head with nonsense!"

"It isn't nonsense," said Sophie. "But I have made up my mind never to let our domestic peace be imperilled by such an element as this. And I—I can't consent to receive your mother here, Harry."

Mr. Garland whistled low and long.

"The deuce you can't!" said he.

"You won't ask it, will you, dear?" coaxed the young wife, in her sweetest accents.

"If you only knew my mother, Sophie—" he began.

"But I don't know her," pleaded Sophie, "and I don't want to know her."

"I'm sure you would like her, Sophie—and I am positively certain you could not help loving her."

"As if there ever could be any relationship nearer than armed neutrality between mother and daughter-in-law," satirically observed Mrs. Garland. "No, Harry, it is too dangerous an experiment to try. You will let me have my own way in this matter, will you not?" she added, carelessly. "It is the last favour I have asked of you."

"Of course you are the mistress here," said

CHRONIC INDIGESTION and its attendant Misery and Suffering Cured with Tonic "DOCTOR" (purely vegetable), 2/6, from Chemists; 3/-, post free from Dr. Hogg, "Glenview," Bournemouth. Sample bottle and pamphlet, with Analytical Reports, &c., 6 Stamps

FACETIE.

CLAUDE: "If I kiss you will you call your father?" Maude: "It won't be at all necessary for you to kiss the whole family."

"MRS. MOKE frequently goes to the theatre in spite of her husband's recent death." "Yes; but she goes only to plays that make her weep."

SERVANT: "I'll go if you tell me to; but you'll miss me after I'm gone." Lady of the House: "Yes; but I shan't miss so many other things."

ADA: "She refused him, as she thought he would propose again." Polly: "And did he?" Ada: "Oh, yes. But it was to another girl."

"Where shall I put this paper so as to be sure of seeing it to-morrow?" inquired Mary Jane of her brother Charles. "On the looking-glass," was her reply.

SHE: "I never expected to work like this when I married you." He: "I didn't suppose you cared. You worked hard enough to get me, didn't you?"

THE woman who had just moved in: "The first thing we want to do is to tear down these old curtains these people have left." Her Husband: "It seems you have no reverence for the shades of the departed."

CLARA: "Some girls appear to like to have engaged men call on them." Fan: "I do! I have three engaged men calling on me now." Clara: "Goodness! Who are they engaged to?" Fan: "Me!"

"I WOULDN'T marry you if you had three times the wealth of my father," she said. "I presume you know," he replied, with dignity, "that if I had that much money there would be no necessity for me to marry."

"WHY did you leave your last place?" asked the lady who was looking for a cook. "Well, mum, it was just this way," returned the applicant. "They had their dinner there so late it gave me no chance to ride my bicycle in the park of an evening."

JORKING: "You are looking unwell this morning, old fellow." Walker: "I feel very ill, indeed. Didn't have a wink of sleep last night." "How was that?" "When I got home I couldn't find my latchkey, and had to sit on the doorstep all night. Didn't find it till morning." "Where was it?" "In my hand."

"TELL me the truth. Is it not my poverty that stands between us?" She (sadly): "Y-e-a." He (with a ray of hope): "I admit that I am poor, but I have an aged uncle who is very rich, and a bachelor. He is an invalid and cannot long survive." She: "How kind and thoughtful you are. Will you introduce him to me?"

THE commanding officer had surprised the young lieutenant and his daughter trying to occupy the same chair. The lieutenant sprang to his feet and saluted. "Sir," he said, "I have the honour to report an engagement at close quarters, in which I have been entirely victorious. It now merely remains for you to give your sanction to the terms of surrender."

MISTRESS (angrily): "Bridget, I find that you were one of my evening ball-gowns at the 'bus drivers' ball last evening. It's the worst piece of impudence I ever heard of. You ought to be ashamed of yourself." Bridget (meekly): "O! was, mum; O! was I and me young man said as if O! ivir were sich an fudulent dress in public agin he'd break our engagement."

At the Liverpool landing-stage a man was seen hastening down one of the bridges. The ferry-boat was a short distance away from the landing-stage. Hurrying his umbrella on board, he knocked off the tall hat of an elderly gentleman, and the next second upset an old lady with his handbag. Then, with a harlequin-like leap, he landed on deck, completing something like a somersault over the bulwarks. After gathering himself together, and securing his umbrella and bag, he remarked to a fellow passenger near him, "By Jove! that was a near touch!" "Yes," returned the passenger; "you've caught it, but you're in the wrong boat. This one is coming in."

MOTHER: "What is the matter, Clara? You look distressed." Clara (a bride): "George has had to go off on a trip, and he won't be back for—two days—two—hoo!" (A year later) Same Mother: "How long will your husband be away?" Same Clara: "I forgot to ask."

HUSBAND: "Why don't you wear your new dress?" Wife: "It is unbecoming, or else it is out of style, or possibly it is a horrible misfit, I'm not sure which; but I must look like a fright or a simperton in it." Husband: "Why so?" "All my friends praise it."

"Oh, you needn't talk," said the indignant wife; "what would you be to-day if it weren't for my money, I'd like to know!" "I really don't know, my dear," calmly replied the heartless wretch, "but I'm inclined to think I would be a bachelor."

A CLASS was being examined in spelling the other day at a well-known school, when the following episode caused much laughter. "Mabel," said the teacher, "you may spell kitten." "K, double I, double t, e, n," said Mabel. Teacher: "Kitten has two 't's, then, has it?" Mabel: "Yes, ma'am; our kitten has."

JACK: "Come old man, cheer up! What if she did break the engagement! She's not the only fish in the swim." Tom: "Oh, I don't care anything about her breaking the engagement, but you see I've got to go right on paying instalments on the ring for the next six months. That's where the icy breeze comes in."

"How that boy of mine has improved in his penmanship!" exclaimed Mr. Bins, with fatherly pride, glancing over a letter he had just received from his eldest son, away on his first visit. Then Mr. Bins began to read it. It began, "Dearest Lucy." No, it wasn't the letter the boy had meant to send to his father.

SHORTLY before I left school a new teacher had been engaged. "What's your name?" he said, addressing the first boy on the bench. "Jule Simpson," replied the lad. "Not Jule—Julius," said the teacher solemnly. "You should not cut words short in that way." Then, addressing the next boy, he asked, "What is your name?" "Billous Simpson, sir." The next thing the new teacher had to do was to rap for order.

ONE of the social stars of Paris is rebuked by a friend, who says, sternly, "Cor, if I were you I should be afraid of having bad luck. The way you neglect your poor old blind father is awful, and you so rich now." "Neglect him! Why, you are mistaken." "No, I ain't. Isn't he begging at a street corner not half a mile from here?" "Well, and every time I pass don't I give him a penny!"

LOCAL POLITICIAN (whose friends have given him a brass-band serenade): "My fellow-citizens, this spontaneous tribute touches me deeply. I am at a loss to find words to express my thanks. You have laid me under obligations I shall never, never be able to repay." Leader of Brass Band (in a loud whisper): "Excuse me, Mr. Greenly, but I fancied this was to be strictly a cash transaction."

IN a case of slander that was heard not long ago a lady had gone into the witness-box on behalf of the plaintiff, whose counsel was examining her. "Now, madam," the lawyer began, "please repeat the slanderous statements made by the defendant on this occasion, just as you heard them." "Oh, they are unfit for any respectable person to hear!" was the emphatic answer. "Then," said the examiner coaxingly, "suppose you just whisper them to the judge."

A DOCTOR in the village of Whitefell had under his advice a certain man named White. Calling one day to see him, he said: "Well, my good fellow, I think you might have a little weak chicken broth to-morrow." After two days he called again, and asked the patient how he was. "No better," was the answer. The doctor looked astonished, and asked if he had the weak chicken broth. "No," said the man. "And why have you not had it?" asked the doctor. "Well, it's this way," said White. "My wife said she could find a weak chicken, so she just tied one up until it gets weak, and then she will make broth for me."

FATHER: "Come, young man, get your coat off and come with me!" Tommy: "You're not going to beat me, are you, dad?" Father: "Certainly. Didn't I tell you this morning that I would settle with you for your bad behaviour?" Tommy: "Yes; but I thought it was only a joke, like when you told the grocer you were going to settle with him."

TWO travellers were standing on the steps of an hotel in the town of Keswick. Said one: "Which lake do you prefer, Keswick or Derwentwater?" "Why," replied the other, "don't you know they're synonymous?" "Oh, yes, I know they are," rejoined the first speaker, determined not to display his ignorance; "but then I think that Derwentwater is so much more synonymous."

MR. HONEYBUCKLE: "Don't you remember, dear, when your father forbade me the house?" Mrs. Honeybuckle: "Yes, and when mother wouldn't let me go out of her sight, not for one minute." Mr. Honeybuckle: "And I had made up my mind to go off and dig gold on the Klondike!" Mrs. Honeybuckle: "Yes, and I frightened father into thinking I was in a decline." Both together: "Wasn't those happy days!"

MANAGER: "Yes, I've decided to accept your war play. It'll be sure to go. There can't be any doubt of it." Author: "Ah, I'm glad you think so well of it! I—"

MANAGER: "Oh, I don't think much of the play itself. It doesn't amount to much. But I've just succeeded in getting a full suit of clothes that was worn by a soldier who fell at Omdurman. That suit will be worn by the star, and it won't make any difference about the play. There's a fortune in it."

"PATRICK, the Widow Maloney tells me that you have stolen one of her finest pigs. Is that correct or not?" "Yis, yer honor." "What have you done with it?" "Killed and ate it, yer honor." "Oh, Patrick! Patrick! when you are brought face to face with the widow and her pig on judgment day, what account will you be able to give of yourself when the widow accuses you of stealing?" "Did you say the pig would be there, yer reverence?" "To be sure I did." "Well, then, yer reverence, I'll say, 'Mrs. Maloney, there's yer pig!'"

IN a manse in Fife, the conversation of a large party one evening turned on a volume of sermons which had just been published with considerable success, and was supposed to have brought a round sum into the hands of the author. When the minister's wife heard of what had been made by the volume, her imagination was excited, and, turning to her husband, who sat a little aside, she said: "My dear, I see nothing to hinder you to print a few of your sermons, too." They were a printed lang syne," said the candid minister in his wife's ear.

OLD LADY (to driver of growler): "Now, driver, I want you to go very carefully." "Certainly, mum." "And not go racing with other cabs." "No, mum." "And not go round the corners quickly." "No, mum." After the job, the old lady, handing him a shilling, said, "You have driven me very carefully and well, and here is a shilling for you. Have you driven a cab all your life?" "No, mum; I used to drive a hearse, and blast if I don't go back to it; it's a better game than this. I hope I'll drive yer again, mum."

MRS. MILLER is one of those inoffensive persons who are continually dreading that they may by some mischance hurt the feelings of others. Added to this she has had considerable trouble in getting a suitable cook and does not wish to offend her. "John," she said to the manservant on the morning following the party, "do you happen to know whether—that is, I mean, can you find out, without asking the cook, whether the tinned salmon was all eaten last night?" "You see, I don't wish to ask her, because she may have eaten it, and then she would feel uncomfortable," added the good soul. "If you please, ma'am," replied the man, "the new cook has eaten the tinned salmon, and if you was to say anything to her you couldn't make her more uncomfortable than she is."

SOCIETY.

THE Prince and Princess of Wales will, it is believed, leave England for the South of France early in February, and will then be away for some time. Princess Victoria will accompany her parents.

THE Empress Frederick will stay at Osborne until the second week in January, when she is going to Berlin for a month, and then to Athens on a visit to the Duke and Duchess of Sparta.

THE Duke and Duchess of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha will celebrate their silver-wedding on the 23rd of next month. Their already superb collection of plate will then be considerably added to.

It is stated that the Queen intends to revive the old custom of holding a Court in February by invitation, or rather by command. The statement has been made for the last four winters, but so far no court has been held.

THE Duke and Duchess of York will make York Cottage their headquarters until they come to town for the season on Monday, February 6th. The Duke and Duchess of York and their children will spend a week or ten days at Osborne with the Queen shortly.

THE Emperor of Germany will be with us, according to present plans, during the busiest part of the London season, on the conclusion of which he will visit Cowes. He further proposes to journey to Ireland and some of our large cities. It is not impossible that he may be accompanied by the Empress and the Princess Victoria Louise, whom the Queen has never seen.

THE Duke and Duchess of Connaught, with Princesses Margaret and Patricia, are safely settled in the Villa Cedri, about two miles outside the San Nicolo gate at Florence. Their Royal Highnesses intend to stay about two months near the beautiful Italian city, during which time the two young Princesses are to continue their studies.

THE German Emperor has appointed his brother-in-law, Prince Frederick Leopold of Prussia (brother of the Duchess of Connaught), to the command of the 22nd Cavalry Division; so he and the Princess (a sister of the Empress) have left Potsdam for Cassel, where they are to reside for two years. Prince and Princess Frederick Leopold are said to be intensely annoyed at having to leave Glienecke, their beautiful place near Potsdam, where they have lived constantly since their marriage.

THE Queen intends to return home from the Riviera through Germany about the middle of April, but, according to present plans, her Majesty will be for a week the guest of the Empress Frederick at Friedrichshof, her château on the Taunus Hills, near Homburg, and she will not go anywhere near to Coburg. The Emperor William will of course pay a visit to Friedrichshof during the Queen's stay there; but no "large family gathering" is likely to take place either there or anywhere else in Germany.

THE Duke of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha contemplates visiting England after the silver-wedding festivities next month, probably arriving early in February.

THE appointment of Lord Hopetoun to be Lord Chamberlain has given much satisfaction, as he is very popular and well known as an excellent man of business. Lord Hopetoun has some knowledge of Court routine, for he was a lord-in-waiting on the Queen for several years before he went out to Australia as Governor of Victoria, where he was a complete success in all respects. Lord Hopetoun's appointment is likely to be the commencement of a new era in Court functions and State entertainments, for the changes which have been long in contemplation will now be carried out under the auspices of a young and energetic Lord Chamberlain.

STATISTICS.

THE entire coastline of the globe is about 136,000 miles.

It is said that over £30,000 is spent on New Year's Day in Paris on sweetmeats alone.

In ten years the descendants of ten rabbits, if left unmolested will number 70,000,000.

THE yearly cost of Government printing and binding in Great Britain is over £500,000.

THE estimate of the number of tramps in the United States varies between 40,000 and 60,000.

GEMS.

It is right to be contented with what we have, never with what we are.

THE principal end or object of learning is not merely to know, but to know for some end or purpose.

GOOD nature is the very air of a good mind; the sign of a large and generous soul, and the peculiar soil in which virtue prospers.

THERE is a department which suits the figure and talents of each person; it is always lost when we quit it to assume that of another.

LABOUR is the ornament of the citizen; the reward of toil is when you confer blessings on others. His high dignity confers honour on the king; be ours the glory of our hands.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

SHORTBREAD.—To two pounds of flour allow six ounces of sifted sugar, and two ounces respectively of candied citron, orange-peel, and blanched almonds. These must be cut up small and mixed with the flour; rub into this one pound of cold butter, after which work in half-pound more, which must be melted. The less heavy the kneading the shorter and crispier will the cakes be. Roll out the dough, and cut into oblong or square cakes; pinch them all round the edges, flatten them well at the top (in Scotland they use a dabber) with a fork handle. Sprinkle caraway seeds over them, and some strips of citron peel; bake on floured paper.

FOLKSTONE PUDDING PIE.—Ingredients for twelve puddings: One pint of milk, three ounces of ground rice, three ounces of butter, quarter of a pound of sugar, flavouring of lemon peel, four eggs, puff paste, currants. Infuse the lemon rind in the milk, and when it is well flavoured strain it, and add the rice; boil these together for a quarter of an hour, stirring all the time; then take them off the fire, pour in the butter, sugar and eggs, and let these latter be well beaten before they are added to the other ingredients; when nearly cold, line some patty pans with puff-paste, fill with the custard, strew over each a few currants, and bake from twenty to twenty-five minutes in a moderate oven.

CHRISTMAS BUN.—Rub three quarters of a pound of butter into two pounds of flour; salt to taste. Add a little warm water and two tablespoonfuls of good thick yeast; knead this well into a light paste. Put aside about one-third of this, and work into the rest one and a half pounds of stoned and dried currants, two pounds of stoned raisins, quarter pound of blanched almonds chopped small, half-pound of candied orange, lemon and citron, all finely minced; of white pepper, ground ginger, and pounded cinnamon, quarter ounce each. Work this well, and shape it into cylindrical form. Roll out the other dough, put it round the above, fasten the ends over with water, and press flat. Prick holes right through the cake from top to bottom with skewers; wrap it round with thick buttered paper, tie it round, and bake for one and a half hours more in a moderate oven.

MISCELLANEOUS.

TAME snakes are used in Morocco to clear houses of rats and mice.

It is customary in China to congratulate a fat man, because it is taken for granted that he must be rich.

THE elephant beetle of Venezuela is the biggest of its species. An average specimen of this insect, when full grown, weighs half a pound.

THE sprat is one of the most difficult fish to capture alive, as when caught in the ordinary way the fish dies when it comes in contact with the meshes of the net.

THE Arabs show their friendliness when meeting by shaking hands six or eight times. Arabs of distinction go beyond this—they embrace each other several times.

BEFORE the invention of iron skates rough bone skates were always used, and apparently with just as much enjoyment. The bones needed little alteration, and the speed skaters attained on these rough skates was considerable.

THE season of jollification and merry-making in Scotland is at the beginning of the New Year. This period used to be known as the "Daff Days," in allusion to the general dedication of the season to joy and folly.

A WINDOW made entirely of stone has been presented to a French cathedral. The stone is nephrite, found in Siberia, and so beautifully transparent that, when placed as it is, it catches the sun's rays and reflects them into the interior of the cathedral.

THE eyes of snakes are never closed. Alive or dead, sleeping or waking, they are always wide open. They have no eyelids, and the eye is protected only by a strong scale, which is as clear and transparent as glass, and allows the most perfect vision.

SMOKING is so common in Japan that all men and most ladies smoke, the girls beginning when they are about ten years of age. The ladies have pipes with longer stems than the men, and if one of them wishes to show a gentleman a special mark of favour, she lights her pipe, takes a whiff, hands it to him, and lets him smoke.

It is a strange fact that whilst the teeth of the negro on the old plantations were remarkable for their whiteness, those of the freed nigger of the present day are in an infinitely worse condition than those of his white brother. This is owing entirely to the change of diet and the coloured man's weakness for sweetmeats.

IN the sixteenth century there was a curious enactment in England whereby street hawkers were forbidden to sell piums and apples, for the reason that servants and apprentices were unable to resist the sight of them, and were consequently tempted to steal their employers' money in order to enjoy the costly delicacies.

THE tribes to the east of the Cordilleras, in Southern Patagonia, belong to Araucanian stock and are a superior race. The Tehuichas—as they call themselves—of Southern and Eastern Patagonia are the people whose unusual stature gave rise to the fables of the early days to the effect that the natives of this region were giants averaging nine or ten feet in height. It is said that they are the tallest human beings in the world, the men averaging but slightly less than six feet, while individuals of four to six inches above that mark are not uncommon. They are in reality by no means savages, but somewhat civilized barbarians. They are almost unacquainted with the use of firearms, notwithstanding some contact with the whites, but they have plenty of horses and dogs. Unsurpassed hunters, they capture the guanaco and the rheu, or South American ostrich, and from the skins of these and other animals they make clothes and coverings for their tents. They make beautiful "capas" or "mantles" of furs and feathers, which find a ready market, most of the proceeds being spent for bad whisky, which is brought into the country in quantities.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

J. C. F.—Inquire at Inland Revenue Office.

D. S.—You had better apply to the advertiser.

M. G.—We never heard of any charity so named.

J. J. S.—You might ascertain at Somerset House.

UNHAPPY.—There must also be cruelty or desertion.

RALPH.—Threepenny pieces were first coined in 1828.

H. K.—Holligoland was ceded to Germany in August, 1890.

CURIOSUS READER.—Half-farthings were coined in 1848.

GERALD.—You can easily teach yourself in your spare time.

E. L.—There is nothing illegal in a marriage between cousins.

IN DUTY.—Your best course would be to obtain legal assistance.

V. C.—Unless he bought them outright, the price cannot be recovered.

ANXIOUS TO KNOW.—Up to the expiration of the notice and no longer.

DOLLY.—Do not worry about what your friends say. You are not too stout.

H. F.—A Manila rope is much stronger than one made of ordinary hemp.

RONIX.—The charge of the Light Brigade was an incident in the battle of Balaklava.

DISCOURAGED.—It is a very difficult matter; your only chance is to keep on inquiring.

S. M.—The Mississippi (with Missouri) is 4,200 miles in length, the Nile 3,670, and the Amazon 3,400.

S. R.—The debt cannot be recovered unless it has been acknowledged since the borrower came of age.

A. R.—There is nothing better than you can get at the shops for less than it would cost you to make up.

CLARE.—The Queen is the granddaughter eight times removed from James VI. of Scotland and I. of England.

INTERESTED.—We cannot answer medical questions in this column. Your friend had better follow his doctor's advice.

NATALIE.—A pawnbroker cannot be legally compelled to sell an article at the price marked upon it in his window.

L. A.—A little skinned milk lightly rubbed over with a soft cloth is the safest; but if the outer skin is worn off, you cannot remedy it.

NERVOUS.—It will be necessary to have the nail removed by a chiropodist or surgeon; the operation is not serious, and need neither be painful nor slow.

DOLLY.—Without having seen it, any recommendation might do you more harm than good. Show the damage to a professional who may possibly set it right.

A. G.—Unless you can staunch it by soaking with water, it will not hold with paint or enamel. If allowed to get too dry, it needs to be well soaked before use.

PUZZLED.—The pupil of the eye is so called because when looking in it is a very small image of the observer; may be seen, hence the term from the Latin "pupillus," or little pupil.

OLD READER.—An I O U is merely a piece of evidence, which may be produced along with any other evidence of the debt, if it is necessary to take legal proceedings for its recovery.

OLIVE.—Our advice to you is by all means to be ruled by your mother, and, if she does not wish you to see the young man then give him up. Your mother probably has good reasons for her decision.

LIZ.—If your hands are long—no matter how white—by no means load them with jewels, as this will add to the horny look of the fingers, which should appear graceful. It is better to keep them ringless.

DESPAIRING TEN.—How are we to judge whether or not the girl loves you? If you are unable to determine, collect the courage to find out by a proposal of marriage, it is not to be expected that anyone else can aid you.

YORUMAMUS.—If it is desired to have letters kept at the Post-office for any time, then an arrangement is necessary, but for the occasional chance sending of a letter to their care, no preliminary bargain is needed.

GRATIE.—You should use a little liquid ammonia in the water in which you wash. This will completely remove the dirt and give you as cleanly an appearance as any one who does not work under such unfavourable conditions.

M. E.—In the event of war with France, it is almost certain the Volunteers would be called out and required to defend any point which might seem in the estimation of the authorities most open to attack; this would be about London.

A. V.—Let simplicity be the main thing aimed at; do not be vulgar, recoil from slang, put your thoughts into lowest words, and whether you speak lowland Scotch or purest English is immaterial; true Scotch is not vulgar; there is nothing more musical, expressive, or polite than the speech of an educated Scotch man or woman.

A FRIEND.—If you are wise you will have nothing whatever to do with the affair. The adage about interfering in other people's quarrels is "somewhat musty," but it is none the less pertinent, and applies with double force in the case of husband and wife.

V. L.—Put one ounce of resin in a bottle, and on it pour one pint of methylated spirits. Let it stand till the resin is quite dissolved, when it will be ready for use. Before spraying a drawing with the fixative, be sure always to shake the bottle more. If the mixture should prove too sticky, a little more spirit should be added to it.

L. H.—Umbrellas should never be allowed to stand; folded up. The proper way is to unfold it and shake it out when you enter your house or your office and expect not to carry the umbrella during the next few hours or a longer period. Otherwise, the silk is much more liable to crack at the crosses, which are always the weakest point in an umbrella, unless it meets with an accident that tears the silk or breaks the stick.

GREENA.—The "three legs" which are the arms of the Isle of Man were first introduced by Alexander III. of Scotland after his conquest of the island in 1270; they were substituted for the old ensign of a ship in full sail; the symbol, however, is found elsewhere, and in earlier times, as on old coins of Sicily, where, as in the Isle of Man, it denotes how the island faces three different coasts.

PHYLLIS.—Oysters a la Métropole are prepared by putting three large oysters on a round of buttered brown bread, season with lemon juice, cayenne pepper, and over the insinuating bivalves spread a layer of the finest Russian caviare. Even more delicious are they when treated to a warm bath of cream allowed to get hot and hot. Serve in dainty white dariole cups, and sprinkle with finely-chopped fried parsley.

"JOY COMETH IN THE MORNING."

In the dusk of the quiet morning,
As the misty shadows of gray
Are quickly and silently forming
To drift with their darkness away;
While the "red and gold" are adorning
The brow of the swift-coming day.

It is then that our way seems brighter
And the heart that was crushed at eve,
With its burden of care grows lighter
As we rise from our benumbed knees,
And the earth-stained soul is sweeter,
As daylight creeps over the trees.

And ever, the night angels tarry,
By us, as we silently pray
For strength and for grace to carry
Our burden for another day.
And they smile on us that are weary
Ere they drift up the shining way.

Oh the joy of morning is dearest
That touches the life-time of care,
And the Father is always nearest
In the days that crowned with prayer,
And each cry of the soul He heareth,
While the burden lies, too, will bear.

DESPERATION.—It would be out of the question to compel the young woman under any known law to marry you, but even if you had the power to do so you surely would not be guilty of such folly. An unwilling marriage is a terrible affair. It has possibilities of wretchedness beyond words to describe. If you are a young man with any judgment and discretion you should know that only unhappiness can come of such an act.

J. P.—Ants may be got rid of by putting little heaps of oat-part meal to ten of finely powdered loaf sugar near their nests or runs; they eat that and die; or put a bit of camphor about the size of a walnut in two quarts of hot water, and when dissolved paint all infested wood with it; that also is effective; or lay down "rough" bones; when covered with the insects throw into hot water, drain off moisture and lay down bones again; persist with cure for some time.

HAL.—The first steam lifeboat was introduced by the National Institution in 1890 at Harwich; in same year a firm of shipbuilders on the Thames, at Blackwall, constructed a lifeboat of steel, propelled by a turbine wheel; in practice, however, it is found most serviceable to have the rowing lifeboat manned by its usual crew, taken out to the wreck when necessary by an ordinary tug; this is a class of steamboat constructed to meet the very stormiest weather.

CARRIE.—Take two cups of boiling water, half an ounce of powdered borax, a quarter of an ounce of gum camphor; shake all together in a bottle, and apply to the greasy stains. A more elaborate recipe is: Two tablespoonfuls of alcohol, half tablespoonful of ammonia, and teaspoonful of ether mixed together; lay the mixture on the oil spot and then take a sponge and clean water, and rub and it will disappear. Very often ammonia and water alone suffice for the purpose.

NELLIE.—Grate two medium-sized potatoes into a bowl containing one pint of clean cold water; strain carefully through a sieve, allowing the liquid to fall into another vessel containing an additional pint of cold water; let it settle, and then pour off the water and bottle for use. It may be put into a clean fruit jar. Bottly rub the soiled fabric or garment with a sponge dipped in the potato water, after which wash it in clean water; dry carefully in the shade and iron.

BRENDA.—The so-called language of stamps is as follows:—When the postage stamp is placed upside down in the left-hand corner of the envelope, it means "I love you," or the same crosswise. "My heart is another's"; straight up and down, "Good-bye, sweet-heart, good-bye"; upside down in the right-hand corner, "Write me more"; in the centre at top "Yes"; opposite at the bottom "No"; on the right-hand corner, at a right angle, "Do you love me?" in the left-hand corner, "I hate you"; top corner on the right, "I wish your friendship"; bottom corner on the left, "I seek your acquaintance" on a line with the surname, "Accept my love"; the same upside down, "I am engaged"; at a right angle in the same place, "I long to see you"; in the middle of the right-hand edge, "Write immediately."

BURN.—It is best to have gowns cleaned by the dry cleaning process at the hands of a professional cleaner, for then there is no fear of their being shrunk or stretched out of shape in the process. You can, however, wash cashmere at home in the same way as flannels. First shake the material free of dust and then plunge it into a nice lather made by adding boiled soap to warm water. Work the article about in the water till clean and then rinse it in water of the same temperature as the first. It may need more than one rinsing and the last should be slightly tinged with blue. Do not let the water be hotter than you can bear the hands in comfortably, and do not wring the material with the hands. If you have a wringer use it, otherwise squeeze out the water with your hands, and hang out to dry in the open air. To insure success you must work quickly, and not leave the material soaking or lying about after it has been taken out of the water.

E. T.—Free the ends of the drumsticks from the body. Place the turkey on the platter with the head at the left. Unless the platter be very large, provide an extra dish, also a fork for serving. Insert the carving fork across the middle of the breastbone. Cut through the skin between the breast and the thigh. Bend the leg over, and cut off close to the body and through the joint. Shave off the breast in thin slices, slanting from the front of the breastbone down toward the wing joint. Tip the bird over slightly, and with the point of the knife remove the oyster and the small, dark portion found on the side bone. Then remove the fork from the breast and divide the leg and wing. Cut through the skin between the body and the breast and with a spoon remove a portion of the stuffing. Serve light or dark meat and stuffing as preferred. If carved in this way, the turkey will be left with one-half entire, and if placed on a clean platter, with the side cut nearest the carver, and garnished with parsley, will present nearly as fine an appearance to all but the carver, as when first served. When there are many to be served, take off the leg and the wing from each side and slice the whole of the breast before removing the fork, then divide as required.

ARTIE.—The Crusades was undoubtedly the most unnecessary war on record. Previous to 1063, the Fatimite Caliphs of Egypt had governed Syria, and had shown considerable toleration to Christians both as residents and pilgrims. In journeying through the desert, the hosts of pilgrims might be maltreated by the wild Arabs, but systematic persecution by the Mohammedans there was none. After the above date, however, Palestine was overrun by the Seljuk Turks from the Caucasus, a lawless race, ignorant even of the religion they professed, and given to all manner of violence. In Jerusalem, Christians and Moslems alike were massacred, but naturally the former suffered most, and their wrongs were deeply resented in Europe. The rescue of the holy city was preached as a sacred duty by Peter the Hermit, and the West poured out its best and its worst to the East. But between the years 1096 and 1098, before a single Crusader had set foot on Syrian soil, the Egyptian Caliphs had reconquered Jerusalem, and there is no reason to doubt that the former custom of toleration would have been restored had not the Crusaders persisted in their invasion. Almost certainly the comparatively enlightened Saracens would have yielded to diplomacy all the required facilities for visiting the Holy Places, and in the same way would have gained without such frightful waste of life all the advantages to commerce and learning accruing from intercourse with the East which are usually put to the credit of the Crusades.

THE LONDON READER can be sent to any part of the world post-free Three-halfpence Weekly; or Quarterly, One Shilling and Eightpence. The yearly subscription for the Monthly Part, including Christmas Part, is Eight Shillings and Eightpence, post-free.

ALL BACK NUMBERS, PARTS AND VOLUMES are in print, and may be had of any Booksellers.

NOTICE.—The December and Christmas Double Part, 451 & 452, are Now Ready, price One Shilling; post free, One Shilling and Threepence. Also Vol. LXXII, bound in cloth, 6s. 6d.

THE INDEX to Vol. LXXI is now Ready; Price One Penny, post-free, Three-halfpence.

ALL LETTERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF THE LONDON READER, 26, Catherine Street, Strand, W.C.

*. We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

A FEW WISE OLD SAWS.

- “Fretting mends no broken dishes; brings us none of all our wishes!”
(Happy he who often fishes for his **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**)
- “Much better short of pence than short of common sense!”
(Most folk of great intelligence are taking **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**)
- “A good wife and health are a man's best wealth!”
(In public, or by stealth, take sometimes **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**)
- “Better an egg to-day than a hen to-morrow, they say!”
(You're wise to never delay in buying **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**)
- “A very little oil will often save much toil!”
(To help through life's turmoil, take ever **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**)
- “A man of words, and not of deeds, is like a garden full of weeds!”
(For acting well, naught supersedes a course of **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**)
- “The sooner the better; delay is a fetter!”
(Good health's oft a debtor to prompt use of **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**)
- “Be your own most useful friend; cease on others to depend!”
(To this end we recommend a box of **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**)
- “East or West, home you'll find is best!”
(To have there real rest, take sometimes **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**)
- “Now is now-here, but to-morrow is no-where!”
(To-night see that they're there—your box of **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**)
- “Better a blush on the face than a spot on the heart that's base!”
(But not harmful in either case is a course of **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**)
- “Who heeds not a penny shall likely ne'er have any!”
(And you can never spend too many in buying **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**)
- “'Tis known that little strokes can fell the greatest oaks!”
(Both great and little folks are taking **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**)
- “Water that's run by, will never turn the mill!”
(Be sure to keep by you still a stock of **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**)
- “'Tis a short and pleasant trip to a lady's cherry lip!”
(Here's the lady's popular tip: Try a few **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**)
- “A key of solid gold cannot health's gate unfold!”
(What can, we've truthfully told, is—a course of **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**)
- “Be sure, 'fore you marry, of a house wherein to tarry!”
(Let another “preliminary” be—a box of **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**)
- “Fair tresses men ensnare; beauty draws us with a single hair!”
(To retain that beauty, take care to use **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**)
- “Many find fault without an end, yet do nothing at all to mend!”
(But to mend—to the end—we recommend—

BEECHAM'S PILLS